UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

ועידת התביעות
Claims Conference
Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany

Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection

Access to the print and/or digital copies of memoirs in this collection is made possible by USHMM on behalf of, and with the support of, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum respects the copyright and other intellectual property rights associated with the materials in its collection and makes good faith efforts to determine the copyright status of such materials. The Museum has a good faith belief that the materials in this collection may be made publicly available. The Museum welcomes additional information about copyright status. If you have additional information or concerns about the copyright ownership of materials in this collection, please contact the Museum's Library by phone at 202-479-9717 or by email at reference@ushmm.org.

Blondlockig in the Belgian Resistance

(The Story of Freide Heller)

by
Marian Gorewitz

© January, 1999

Dedication

To the many brave people, such as Kroll, Sterngold, Blanche, and Oste, Jewish and Gentile, who assisted in the White Brigade.

In loving memory of Shulum Heller, Heshie Heller, Rosa Heller Lefkowitz, Helen Heller, Daniel Isaacman, Blanche von Emerich, and Kroll.

Dedication

To the many brave people, such as Kroll, Sternfeld, Blanche, and Ose, Jewish and Gentile, who assisted in the White Brigade.

In loving memory of Shulum Heller, Heshie Heller, Rosa Heller Lefkowitz, Helen Heller, Daniel Isaacman, Blanche von Emerich, and Kroll.

Credits

Mom, thank you for telling me your story and putting up with my endless questions and even more endless phone calls. I know I was picky and wanted the facts straight. Together I believe we've written the essence of your story.

Thank you, Mark, for helping me through the days and nightmares.

Thank you to many friends who read this in manuscript form. Without friends to encourage me, I would have lost hope. Each of you was supportive and enthusiastic, and kept me going. Thank you, Ruth Lindau, Diana Siegel, Doris Taliaferro, Barbara Hurn and Maria Zayas. Another thank you is due Professor Michael Seidman, a historian and friend who checked dates, place names, and other aspects of this book.

Family members were essential to the writing process, each in their own way. Thank you Heshi, Shalom, Aunt Clara, and Uncle Ilie. Amir, Cali, and Doni motivated me in what at times seemed a heavy task. I love you!

Finally, thank you to those I met at the Vermont Studio Center. I enjoyed a pleasant and productive retreat there!

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 ..... **1**

TIME'S FRAGMENTS 1
IN THE WHITE BRIGADE 3
A DRUNK WILL TALK 8

CHAPTER 2 ..... **10**

WHAT IS TRUE? WHAT IS HISTORY? 10
ROMANIA, 1929 12
ANTWERP BEGINNINGS 17
ROSA 22
TALENT DISCOVERED 24

CHAPTER 3 ..... **29**

CHAPTER 4 ..... **54**

STAR OF DAVID 54
ANTWERP IN GERMAN HANDS 56
DIAMONDS IN THE STREET 62
LIGHTS OUT! 63
FATHER IN DANGER 64
FOOD FOR THOUGHT 67
NEW LOSSES 70
KRISTALNACHT, FRIDAY, JULY 22, 1942 (BELGIUM) 75

CHAPTER 5 ..... **81**

UNASKED AND UNANSWERED 81
THE ABANDONED FACTORY 82
HIDING PASSIVELY IS UNACCEPTABLE 86
"BLONDLOCKIG" 90
ON THE STREETS 92

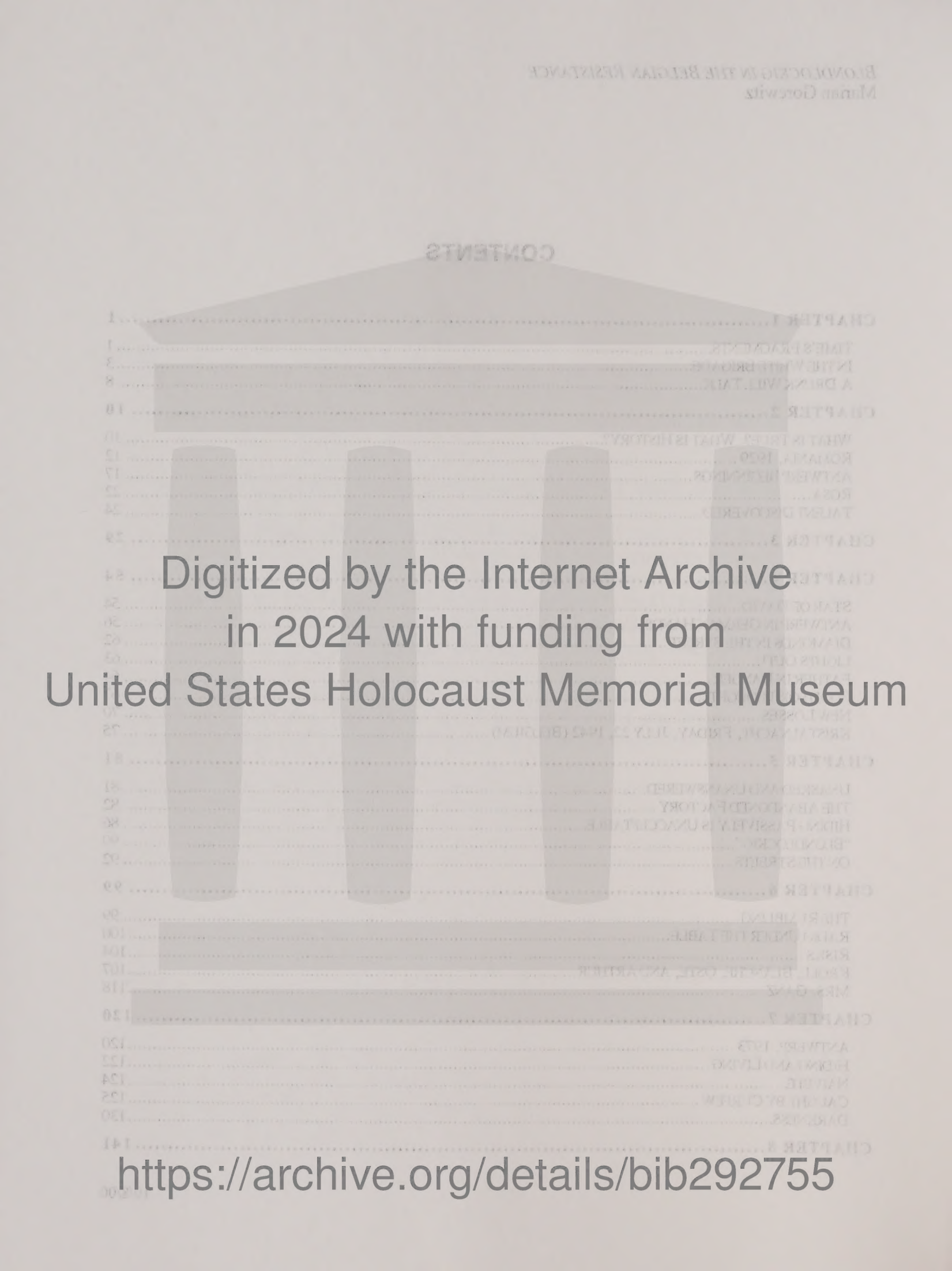
CHAPTER 6 ..... **99**

THE RUMBLING 99
RADIO UNDER THE TABLE 100
RISKS 104
KROLL, BLANCHE, OSTE, AND ARTHUR 107
MRS. GANZ 118

CHAPTER 7 ..... **120**

ANTWERP, 1973 120
HIDING AND LIVING 122
NAIVETÉ 124
CAUGHT BY CURFEW 125
DARKNESS 130

CHAPTER 8 ..... **141**


Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024 with funding from
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

https://archive.org/details/bib292755

AUSCHWICZ INHERITANCE....141
RENEWED FEAR (JANUARY - MAY, 1943)....143

CHAPTER 9....158

HIDDEN CHILD CONFERENCE, BRUSSELS, 1994....158
ON THE RUN (MAY, 1943)....160
OUR OWN PLACE (MAY, 1943 – SEPTEMBER, 1944)....166
SEPTEMBER, 1944....176

CHAPTER 10....180

WRITING RETREAT....180
LIBERATION (SEPTEMBER 4, 1944)....183
LIFE GOES ON (EPILOGUE)....190
GLOSSARY....193

Introduction

by Freide Heller Gorewitz

I think what my daughter is doing by documenting my story and hers is a very important part of my legend as a survivor. In Jewish tradition, we always say, "from generation to generation."

The book talks about the suffering of a family, the loss of youth, extra-ordinary experiences of how my family was able to escape Hitler's persecution. It describes how each individual had different experiences during that journey and time.

An important part of the story is that I was able to go through that period in my life when I was struggling to survive, and I not only survived on my own but had many experiences helping other victims of the period to survive.

My experience with the resistance movement was both courageous and encouraging because it shows that there were many other people who were supporting the truth and the anti-German sentiment and anti-war feeling. Other members of the Resistance movement, like me, risked their lives and the lives of their families to help other fellow human beings.

I feel very strongly that at this point in my life I have to speak about it because the next generation should at least have a documentation of what suffering people went through. I don't want to give a message of hate and revenge but I'd like to speak of just making this world a little more aware so that there should be more brotherhood and atonement.

Marian Kleinman

After the liberation it took me many years before I could talk about this because the pain was too intense and I wanted to get on with my life. Also, I had to sort out the good and the bad in my life and the world. For example, my principal, who I trusted and who was instrumental in the beginning of our being hidden and for getting me fake papers, after the war was found to be a collaborator with the Germans. He was convicted for his actions.

The terror of the events that I went through in 1940, trying to escape from Antwerp and bombs and people being killed around me, will never be gone from my mind. The Kristol Nacht event, when I heard the screaming of young children, mothers, and fathers being separated, and saw the flames of the holy scriptures in the middle of the street, was forever imprinted in my memory.

Chapter 1

Time's Fragments

How do you write a story you've heard your entire life, one that is fragmented by time? Mom's story reverberated darkly throughout my childhood, alluded to but not discussed, known but never explained.

"I dyed my hair blonde and worked in the Underground," she'd say, and the conversation was somehow over. You didn't hear the details, nor would you ask for them; still, it wasn't a taboo subject, as I believed I knew our family history. No one said not to ask about it.

On one wall of her bedroom, there still hangs a framed document, a citation from the King of Belgium commending her for her deeds as a World War II Resistance fighter. She didn't carry a gun or fight anyone physically, however; Mom assumed a Christian identity and, among other things, assisted in the distribution of food ration cards to people hiding from the Gestapo. How did she do this? At some point in adolescence, I tuned out my parents, especially Mom, and we didn't talk about the Holocaust, although I read all of Elie Wiesel's books. Because of what I'd read and studied in Hebrew school about the Holocaust, I always had nightmares.

A few years after Mom joined a Hidden Child support group, everyone invited their children to come share how their parents' experiences had affected their lives. I'd written poetry for as long as I could remember, yet I had never

approached this subject, yet felt so relieved to have a reason to approach it. Both of my siblings, my brothers Heshi and Shalom, attended this special meeting, and I read "Hide a Child," and Shalom, a video artist, showed a video he had made. I was thirty-three.

My life has changed since then; in the past five years I've asked Mom all the questions I could, and two years ago I wrote a screenplay about the war years. It's not enough; for her childhood experiences, so heroically marked by her volunteer work in the Belgian underground, are accentuated by earlier anti-Semitic trauma as well as by the discovery and development of Mom's still-recognized vocal gifts.

Many people know of the hidden children, like Anne Frank, and the concentration camp survivors, like Elie Wiesel, but my mother's story is not often heard. She has described to me her experiences before, during, and shortly after the war, and I will begin each chapter like this first one, with my feelings about Mom and our family history.

In the White Brigade

The first time Kroll gave me an assignment, we met in a bomb shelter a few blocks from my home, as we'd arranged at our first meeting earlier in the week. He gave me the address of a convent and gave me a rations book to deliver.

"Learn the address," he said, "then eat this piece of paper. After you have delivered this ration book, wander around the city until you feel it is safe for you to

return home." Kroll advised me to wait for several minutes before leaving, and he quickly disappeared.

Off I went on my bicycle, to the convent where Chaya Brenner now lived. I wasn't sure how she had ended up there. So much had changed since I had dated her older brother Oscar. I wondered if I would ever see him again, and daydreamed about his humorous manner and the long kisses during youth group retreats. It had been only six months since Oscar was deported, four months since we had gone into hiding.

I tried to be inconspicuous as I rode up to the convent, pretending I was going inside to say prayers or visit a little sister. By looking at me, I thought, no one could know I was Jewish or that, for good luck, I had tucked into my sock the little silver star my brother Heshey had made for me. I had assumed the identity papers of Georgette Yaegar, a Christian. A nun answered the door, and I went inside.

When I told her why I was there, she said she had been expecting someone to come. She was a bit surprised that I wanted to see Chaya, who was now being called Elizabeth.

"I suppose it will be okay for you to see her for a moment or two," the nun said, and she took me to a room that served as a nursery.

There were many children playing, and I immediately recognized the gorgeous six-year-old with her big blue eyes and jet-black hair. She seemed to remember me, and I talked to her about her brother.

"Will you come back again to see me?" Chaya asked. The nun was no where around, and I really wasn't sure I'd be allowed to. I also didn't want to lie to her; I didn't know whether her newly established identity as an orphan was to be short-lived or permanent.

"I hope I can come see you very often, Chaya. It has been so extraordinary. But I can't promise I'll be back any time soon. If I am, it will be our special treat, no?"

Chaya nodded a little sadly, and offered me a hug. As I left, I saw her rejoin the other children, and I knew she'd be safe. Better here than a hiding place like our damp basement, where my parents and brother and sister can't go out during the day. Better here than in the places I'd begun to hear rumors about, where the Germans were taking the Jews.

I talked again to the nun as I was leaving.

"We are placing into foster homes as many young children as we can," she said. "There are many Belgians looking for children to adopt. Next time you come here, Elizabeth may be gone."

"Her new family will still need ration cards for her," I said. "Perhaps I could continue to provide her with these, wherever she might move to."

"Yes," the nun said thoughtfully, and I walked out again into the bright sunlight.

A Drunk Will Talk

We had been hiding in the Addams' house for two or three months when for the third time I saw Mrs. Addams quite drunk. I told Mama about it, again, and after our family discussed it, we all felt it would be safer to move somewhere else. Besides, I was now in the Resistance, and had a few connections.

"Anyone who drinks will talk," Mama told Kroll. I told them what Mrs. Addams' son, who was seventeen like me, had said.

"He told me that when his mother drinks, she talks a lot," I said. "Today she told me she was boasting to her friends about how she is helping people the Germans don't like, because she hates the Germans."

"When I asked her which friend she had said this to, she wasn't sure. 'You know, my friends in the street,' she said. Mama, it's not safe here for us."

"I agree, you need to move, and there is one house I can move all of you to immediately," Kroll said. "It will be a temporary fix, for less than a week, then we'll find something better."

Mama looked so relieved I had to turn my face away. I knew where Kroll would take us, and Mama would be miserable there. At least it would be temporary, I thought, watching her light a cigarette and smile. I couldn't help shuddering a little. We were moving to the devil's house.

Chapter 2

What is True? What is History?

Many of my friends and acquaintances find me humorous and fun to be with. I may not be the life of the party, but I'm generally a positive, upbeat person.

That's why it's hard for me to write about my mother's experiences during World War II. Until recently, I didn't think about or talk about my mother's experiences, except to sometimes tell people that Mom was born in Romania. (She has a slight accent.) Now, when the Holocaust comes up in conversation, I usually tell people that Mom was in the Underground. She and her family were in hiding in Antwerp, Belgium. More and more, I find I'm telling people about Mom's experience. It's not a topic everyone wants to discuss, however.

All my life, I knew my mother had been a hidden child and a resistance fighter, but my mother, her brother Ilie and sister Clara rarely discussed their years in hiding until after the death of Clara's husband. Soon after Uncle Danny's death, Clara met Elie Wiesel, a distant cousin. With his encouragement, Clara told her story to Joan Grossman, and **Clara's Story** was published in 1984.

It was on a crisp fall day in 1983 that Uncle Ilie, Aunt Clara, and Mom gathered to read the manuscript of **Clara's Story**. Afterwards they sat around in Mom's airy living room.

"It's not really what happened, Clara," Ilie said in his brusque way, shaking his head. Clara ignored him.

Later on I heard Ilie and my mother agreeing that **Clara's Story** was as Clara remembered it. Not as they had lived it. Aunt Clara didn't describe Mom's work in the Resistance. It is a wonderful book, however, used by religious schools

in many places. Each of the three siblings had a very different frame of reference for their shared years in hiding.

I had to learn more about Mom's story. History is odd and everyone who "lived it" seems to have a different view of it. After her book was published, Clara began her lecture tours. Now Mom is also involved in talking about her experiences, and has been recorded by the Shoah foundation. Only Ilie doesn't talk about it. He has chosen to leave it in the past.

I'm not writing this to contradict or correct, since I believe there is more than one version of the truth. I am just my mother's daughter, telling her story, telling my story, telling our story.

If it's sometimes sad, I hope readers will still find the hope, courage and beauty in Mom's tale.

I did. I do.

So together, we can learn from Mom's heroism and sorrows.

Romania, 1929

My earliest memories are sad, scary. It's ironic that my father moved us away from Romania, to face anti-Semitism in Belgium ten years later.

One of my earliest memories was riding on the train with my family, moving away from our small town of Borsa, Romania. In Borsa, Father earned a good living as a wholesale grain merchandiser. Mama's family lived nearby and ran a comfortable business.

Sometime before we left Romania, I remember being carried over a bridge to safety. With my family, I stood along the banks of the river across from our town, seeing flames shooting into the sky. Soldiers and civilians, Romanian anti-Semites, rushed through the streets of our neighborhood, torching our homes. Once the

town was in shambles, they terrorized women and children. I could hear people screaming, but Mama and Father gathered my sister and brother together, and told us not to worry, everything would be allright. I didn't believe them, but I didn't cry.

It was soothing to watch Mama carefully lift my one-year-old baby brother Ilie, change his diaper and clothes, and wrap him in warm blankets. Somehow she must have packed our things, too, but those details I don't remember.

I was three years old. It was around 1928 or 1929.

"Where is Heshey?!" Mama demanded. This scared me, because Mama was never one to cry or scream. She always had a commanding way about her and my father adored her.

"He must still be at cheder, studying with the Rabbi," Father said.

I remember we each carried as much as we could, and walking seemed hard, as we were wearing several layers of clothing. Mama and Father rushed with us down the street toward the cheder, several blocks away. The Rabbi was running down the street towards us.

"Rabbi Kemel!" Mama cried. "Where is my son Heshey? Where are you going?"

Rabbi Kemel dashed off without responding.

A block further was the cheder, and Mama ran quickly ahead of us, never losing her poise. I then saw Heshey, who stood below the freshly broken window, helping his classmates safely out of the burning building. The rabbi had told the boys to wait while he looked into the situation, then he locked the door to the school and left them in the building. Heshey was a hero, though he had thrown Mama into a panic.

Across the rushing river, flames devoured our homes, stores, schools and our synagogue. Along with several other families, we silently watched, hand in hand.

"I am not going to stay in this place." Father said. "I want to take you where you can grow up unafraid, where you can be glad to be Jewish."

After the pogrom was over, we returned home. Everything had been ransacked and many possessions were ruined. Father immediately contacted Unrah, the Jewish community leaders, and was told that the best place to go was Antwerp, Belgium. We were told that the members of the Jewish community in Antwerp helped one another, and that there would be work for Father. Father heard that in there were no ghettos in Antwerp, and the Jews were treated without discrimination. Within a few days, Father left for Antwerp.

We didn't stay again in our little house, where I'd shared a bed with my sister Clara, where we had been warmed by coal heated in a little old-fashioned poke stove. We stayed with an aunt or uncle for about two months.

All our relatives wanted to leave, but we were the first ones who left. Our grandmother gave us homemade bread and cookies for our trip, and our uncles and aunts helped us pack. Mamma distributed any usable furniture, which wasn't much, to other families. In horse and wagon, they drove us to meet our train. We had very little money.

"How fast we are going!" Clara said, as the train sped away. Someone on the train gave us paper and crayons, which was a big treat for me; I had never even had a doll!

It was frightening, and I had been terrified. For a long time, I kept seeing flames and fire in front of my eyes, and heard the screaming women and children. The trauma drew me closer to my family, comforted to know we were still together. My mother had cried for my brother, teaching me the fear of loss.

Antwerp Beginnings

54 Leewerik Straat: what a beautiful apartment and home we now had! It was modern which meant that we had electric instead of the gas-lights and candles we'd had in Borsa. There were bathrooms also, and it seemed grand although it didn't have fancy furniture.

The Yudenrade, or Jewish community, was wealthy and supportive. They gave us our wonderful new home, and since they didn't have a soda distributor, they suggested this would be good for Father, so he sold flavors and prepared soda water, which restaurants and homes would buy. This meant we were able to do quite well, since Father had a commodity you couldn't purchase elsewhere.

Our apartment was three stories, and we lived on the first floor. It had a courtyard, and then above our home was a huge building, with a side door leading into the soda factory. A lot of times, people would also come in through our door to go into the factory.

Mama helped in the factory, where the soda-making process was a lot of work. A Russian Jewish woman helped in the house to take care of us children while Mama worked.

When I first went to school for kindergarten, I went to a public school on Lamonear Straat. Yiddish was the only language I spoke, although I understood a spoke a little Romanian and Hungarian, which Mama spoke at home.

My teacher was a very heavy Flemish woman who was plainly dressed. Her sweet round face was warm and loving, and she had brown and white hair.

I felt so alone, and this teacher picked me up and put me on her lap. "Don't be frightened," she said. "You'll speak Flemish in no time." I felt nurtured and loved by this teacher, who protected me and gave me extra care.

Our house, like many around us, had a mezuzah on the door, and every Friday night we lit the Shabbat candles. Being orthodox was taken for granted; all the Jewish people in our community were this way. You didn't even think of not keeping kosher or observing Shabbat, as it was a way of life.

Sukkas was my favorite holiday. On top of our house, Father built a sukkah, with three walls and a drape in front. We strung up all kinds of fruit to hang around the walls, and made colorful paper decorations.

As soon as Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur ended, we'd decorate the sukkah, and then for a week we'd eat all our meals in it, even when it rained. And it rained a lot in Antwerp! We managed somehow. Ilie used to say he liked the rain because then he had even more soup in his bowl.

I loved the singing we'd do during this holiday. We were a singing family. One of Father's brothers was a famous cantor in Romania, who was well known throughout Europe. Neighbors would also come in, and they didn't have to wait to be invited. We'd always have plenty of food, which Mama fixed and neighbors would also bring.

Across the street, a Flemish socialist newspaper, **The Folksgazette**, had just moved into a beautiful new building. I enjoyed watching people go in and out as news happened. Another neighbor I fondly remember down and across the street, was the Beukelaar, which was Antwerp's largest chocolate manufacturer. The air was often perfumed by the delicious smell of the Beukelaar, whose chocolate was even better than its fragrance.

At Chanukah time, we always got presents, even if they were small. Our first year in Antwerp, I remember getting the first doll I ever had. Other presents were small pieces of jewelry, extra chocolate, or an extra piece of clothing. We didn't have abundance, but we were comfortable.

Pesach was a wonderful time because that's when we got our clothes for the whole year. Mama had a seamstress come in for Clara and me, and we'd each get two new pieces of clothing, like a dress or two, or blouse and skirt. I'd also get hand-me-downs from Clara, and we all got new shoes.

Sometimes Mama's brothers, who moved to Czechoslovakia shortly after we'd left Borsa, would come, bringing us presents, for the Pesach Seder. Our uncles would always exclaim about how we'd grown, and then they'd hug and kiss everyone. Uncles Emile and Yitzhak would come by train with their wives Rachel and Miriam. Another one of Mama's brothers, who was very rich, flew in by plane, which astonished us.

Mama prepared delicious food, and Father brought fish or specially slaughtered meats. Like the others in the community, Mama would always bring us to watch schmera matzah being prepared. There were rabbis there to make sure it was kosher, and to say special prayers.

For the meal, Father truly reclined as he led the Seder, helping us remember the release from slavery. Heshey participated, and neighbors and friends always joined us, but Clara and I usually giggled as the Seder story was told, our laughter stopping only when it was time to sing. That was our favorite part, because Clara and I always sang all the songs.

Rosa

As the seventh child of nine, and with only one sister, Mama, whose name was Rosa, was revolutionary, a feminist, with enough will power for several people. During a time before feminism was a popular term, it describes her independent manner. Rosa wasn't tied down by marriage. If she wanted to go out with a man other than her husband, she did. She also smoked openly on the streets, which was unusual for a woman in the 1920's, having started smoking when she was fourteen or so. While everyone saw her as a free spirit and her smoking was deplored by many, if a neighbor's child was sick they'd always call Mama for help.

So what if the custom was for marriages to be arranged? Mama met my father, her husband-to-be, Shulum, the day before the wedding. He was twenty-one and she was fifteen, when they married in the early 1920's. Mama refused to shave her head before the wedding. She didn't quit smoking, either.

A few years after we moved to Antwerp, when I was about six or seven, Mama used to take Clara and me, and sometimes Heshey too, to one of two or three fancy ice-cream parlors. It was usually on Wednesdays, and Father would never join us or eat ice-cream, which wasn't kosher, but sometimes he'd come and pick us up. You could get coffee, delicious cookies and cakes, or even dinner, as well as ice-cream, and there was always live entertainment. Mama would look gorgeous, all dressed up and with make-up on, and she'd sit at a nearby table, drinking coffee or wine while we gobbled our ice-creams and watched everything.

We all especially liked the gypsy music, which featured violins and Hungarian melodies which reminded Mama of her homeland.

"This is your background," Mama would say as we listened to the Hungarian music.

When Mama was growing up, my grandmother wouldn't allow her to use their kosher kitchen. While my children, nephews and nieces will always remember their grandmother as an excellent bake and cook, my mother's mother couldn't trust her youngest daughter not to mess things up out of wildness and fun!

Talent Discovered

Through the night, the balmy night, my song shall float to thee;
In the silence, in the moonlight, come, belov'd to me!
Waving branches softly murmur 'neath the starlit sky.
Never fear that aught can harm thee, love alone is nigh!
Hark! the nightingales are calling, calling now to thee;
Let their plaintive song enthralling, plead again for me
Lovers' joy and lover's sadness these they know full well
Let their silv'ry notes, beloved all my passion tell.
Let the voice of Love implore thee, ere the night be past
Come to me who must adore thee
Yield me joy at last, yield me joy at last;
Ah, joy at last!

Serenade (Ständchen) by Goethe, put to music by Shubert

When we moved, I went to an all-girls' school in Antwerp. Both Clara and I were uniformed like all the other schoolgirls, in a conservative brown jumper, blue suspenders with a pinafore, and long-sleeved white or blue shirt. We were expected to wear clean white gloves, and a hat was required for outside. Our parents had to pay for the uniform, which the school supplied. There I learned how to fold a napkin, wash the floor, and do other tasks girls were expected to perform. Music class was my one favorite class, as I never seemed to get the knack of housekeeping. It was hard for me, sometimes, to keep my gloves white enough, or keep my ankle socks from falling down, and I was always so glad to throw my round blue hat off as soon as I got home each day.

It took a while for me to feel comfortable in Belgium, especially in the beginning. I had to learn German, French, and Flemish. In music class I was happy, for the music teacher really liked my voice, and in fifth grade I was given a solo of three or four lines in the "Serenade."

One day, a strange thing happened while we rehearsed my solo. The rest of the class stood in rows behind me, singing a choral accompaniment at times. With all the windows open, the sweet smell of springtime seemed to float on the air as I sang.

Then the door opened and the mood changed as everyone straightened up, stood taller, stiffened, even the teacher. Mr. Yaeger, our principal, was very strict. I remember my palms suddenly felt sweaty and I wiped them on the blue skirt of my uniform. I had to go on with my solo, even though I felt like a butterfly, suddenly snagged in a net.

The teacher kept playing, we sang on, and Mr. Yaeger quietly listened at the door.

"Bravo, beautiful singing! Who is this child, who sang solo?" Mr. Yaeger clapped as he asked my teacher. With my class, I watched and listened.

"Freide," Mr. Yaeger said, walking towards me, "you have a beautiful voice. I'd like to hear another song."

The music teacher suggested a French folk song, which I sang alone. My knees felt a little wobbly but I loved singing! I relaxed into the song and after the first verse forgot everyone's eyes, watching me.

Mr. Yaeger and the whole class clapped. Yes, I loved singing, but I'd never before felt that my voice was different than any other nine-year-old. I felt enthralled and excited.

When I finished, Mr. Yaegar hugged and kissed me.

"You have an exceptional voice, a special talent. I'm going to help you do something with it. I'll call you to my office in a few days, so bring some music. I'd like to introduce you to a voice teacher. The teacher will come to hear you sing," Mr. Yaegar said.

I couldn't wait to tell Mama. I rushed home, but no one made a big deal about it until a week later, when I told my parents and family that the voice teacher wanted me as a student. Mrs. Liza Von Aden, a member of the Antwerp Music Conservatory faculty, wanted me as a student!

This was a very prestigious school, difficult to get accepted to. I was lucky to be awarded a full scholarship, as my parents couldn't afford these lessons.

We broke the rules that year, when, a few months later, my teacher entered me in the Antwerp City Voice Contest, though I was actually too young for this particular competition. You were supposed to be at least twelve years old. I sang Shubert's Serenade, won first place as young female coloratura voice, and had my picture in the newspaper.

I wish I had the newspaper article I clipped, which told how I won the contest. Except for a few family pictures, I lost my diary and other papers while we were in hiding.

"Freide has talent," Mama used to say, but Father was upset.

"It's not for a girl to sing. Tekitsa[1], girls don't need that," Father said.

After a while, Mr. Yaegar asked me to sing at mass in The Cathedral of Our Lady, his Catholic church. Father was very upset.

"She's only a child," Mama said. "Nothing's going to happen, let her do it." So even though Father never heard me sing the *Ave Verum*, I performed it many

[1] a term of endearment, Hungarian for "doll"

times, unseen in the high loft at the Cathedral of Our Lady, the largest church in Antwerp.

Chapter 3

What is a Normal Childhood, Anyway?

My mother's childhood sounds like a happy, normal childhood after the pogroms in Romania. My grandfather took good care of his family and was well known in Antwerp. All this changed when the war came . . .

Mom likes to tell about her days visiting relatives, before the war. She often visited a farm, where her father sent her to gain weight, for he always thought she was too thin. For a few weeks during the summer, she went to visit her grandmother in Borsa. Once, she visited a farm and ate a whole bunch of poppies, which almost poisoned her to death.

Mom didn't spontaneously tell us stories or share her experiences, but certain stories she liked to repeat. I knew, for example, how she had met Dad, yet other details about her childhood were missing. There was a door shut, and fear prevented me from opening it to see what was inside. I knew there were painful, difficult memories inside.

"Hasn't your mother been through enough?" Dad would sometimes yell at my brothers or me, when we'd misbehaved. The existence of an unhappy trauma was alluded to, while kept carefully hidden.

"If a criminal came into our house and tried to shoot you, your mother would stand in front of you to protect your life," my father regularly said. He saw our mother as a lioness protecting her cubs. Dad's attitude obscured, yet failed to obliterate the dimensions of Mom's experience.

Youth Groups, First Loves

"One of your forty-two boyfriends is whistling outside," Mama said, after she let Leon in the house.

"Oh, Mama," I replied, rushing to the door. Mama teased me about my boyfriends when they came to walk me to youth group meetings. I didn't think it was fair of her to tease me, because these boys were my friends.

Like my brothers and sister and most of the Jewish youth in Antwerp, I joined a Jewish youth group. I belonged at first to Habonim, which means "the builders," in Hebrew. It wasn't as leftwing as Hashomer Hatzayeer, which I joined later, around 1937. Father was upset when I moved to Hatzayeer, and I'm not sure why I did it, either to spite my sister or so I wouldn't have to compete with her. Clara stayed in Habonim, and Heshey was already in Hatzayeer. Ilie was too young for youth groups.

One of the differences is that Habonim was socialist, and Hashomer was communist. With the other children in our neighborhood we'd go together to meetings where we'd talk and learn about Zionism, Hertzel, Palestine. We met twice a week, boys and girls together, to participate in activities like camping, Israeli folk dancing, and singing songs about Israel.

Everyone I knew was involved with Zionist ideas, and we knew that as Jews, we weren't liked. In my family's case, we remembered Romania. All of the youth in these groups hoped to go to Palestine someday. We also read the newspaper and listened to the radio, and learned that Hitler was not be trusted. We were politically aware of such things as the invasion of Czechoslovakia, and heard how much Hitler hated the Jews.

Leon lived down the street from us, and one night, after a Hashomer meeting, he and I went for a snack with some friends. How I used to love those crispy French fried potatoes, cooked on the street corner and served coated with fresh mayonnaise in a brown bag.

That night I couldn't stop myself from staring at the dark hair which framed his face. His big soulful eyes and sensuous mouth! I admired Leon's drawings of nature.

He asked me whether I wanted to move to Israel.

"Of course," I said, and somehow we stopped walking. "Don't you?"

"Some days I feel more sure than others, Freide." We had stopped in a doorway, and suddenly he leaned over and kissed me, long and gently.

"No, no!" I exclaimed, first kissing back, then pushing him away. "You can't do that!" I scrambled away and ran home, right up to my bedroom which I shared with Clara. I rushed to wash my face, and didn't sleep much that night.

"What's bothering you?" Clara asked me a few days later. "You've been acting worried."

"Can you get pregnant by kissing?" I asked, and Clara burst into laughter.

"Is that what you're worrying about?" Clara guffawed.

Wordlessly, I smacked her in the shoulder and ran out of the room. I didn't worry about kissing anymore, that's for sure, and Leon and I kissed, walked in the park, and held hands for about two years. I wish I could show you the pictures of flowers and landscapes he drew in my journal. He drew animals that were both real and imagined.

Leon was serious and smart; my next boyfriend, Oscar Brenner, was always smiling, making me laugh. He wore thick, round glasses and was hefty, with a good sense of humor. A while after I stopped dating Leon, Oscar walked me home one

day, and told me he'd wanted to date me for a while. It was fun to be with Oscar, who was a silly, kind person.

I didn't like to hang out with the girls, although I had a best friend named Eva, and I was considered a bit of a tomboy. I preferred to play soccer, climb trees, or do bike tricks with my brothers and their friends. I remember I always seemed to have scratched knees from playing with the boys.

The youth group meetings were full of loving and caring, and we were all worried about the political scene. We tried to learn a lot of Hebrew, through songs and learning sessions. Looking back, I realize we were training ourselves, in a way, to be pioneers in Israel. We took trips, like hikes, where we had to practically find our own food. Girls weren't allowed to wear makeup, and everyone had to share everything. Some of it was extreme, in that we felt we should be ready to endure all kinds of hardship.

At youth group meetings, people would often ask me to sing, and sometimes I gave little concerts, sang at parties, and lead singing. My favorite songs to sing were Yiddish songs by Bialick, especially "Sea Song." It is about the longing to go to Israel, the place where we all wanted to be, and seeing the land and Lake Keneret.

Another boyfriend I remember was Benny Goodman, the son of a cantor. He was also in Hashomer, and of these three boyfriends, he's the only one who survived the war. He survived one of the camps, though the rest of his family didn't, and came to my wedding to Rubin. He tried to talk me out of getting married, then left to settle in Israel, where he married and had children.

Warning Signs

In the spring of 1939, Uncle Emile and Uncle Sziga, Mama's brothers visited with us. These two brothers had moved to Czechoslovakia before I was born. It wasn't unusual for family to come stay with us for a week, and I thought nothing of having to sleep with Clara in the living room so our uncles would have a bedroom. I'll always remember how happy Clara was with the Swiss watch Uncle Emile gave her.

Mama cooked a delicious dinner of chicken, potatoes, beets, green beans, and freshly baked bread. Father said the blessings over the meal, with my brothers joining.

"We're moving to Palestine," Emile said.

"What about your furniture factories?" Mama asked. She exchanged a look with Father.

"Hitler has just invaded Czechoslovakia, and he has already taken over part of our country. He's a madman, Shulum, and we don't feel safe there anymore."

"Hitler is going to destroy the Jews," Sziga agreed. "We are thinking only of our families. It is hard for us to move, like it was hard for you to come here. But in Palestine, we can live freely as Jews."

"We won't move again," Father said, looking at Mama. "The Jewish people are accepted as part of the community, and I believe we are safe here. It's different from Romania. I don't want to move my family again."

"I understand how you feel. For us also, this will be a second move," Emile said.

"Heshey, tell your uncles about what you are learning in cheder," Mama said. Although she changed the subject, until our uncles left a few days later, I could hear the continuation of this discussion.

At youth group meetings, my friends and I had talked about Hitler. When Uncles Emile and Sziga visited, we saw other Jewish families visited by relatives fleeing their countries. Emile and Sziga weren't the only ones leaving Europe. We heard rumors about the Germans in Germany, who were not letting Jews stay in business. There, Jews were now forced to wear a yellow Star of David armband or a patch. There, people threw stones at Jews, put swastikas all over Jewish homes and businesses, and said they wanted to do away with Jews.

In 1938-1939, Austria and then Czechoslovakia were soon under German control. In 1940 Poland was taken. Mama and Father continued to believe Belgium would be safe, as France and Britain declared war on Germany soon after the invasion of Poland. Father's twin brothers, Benny and Chaim. immigrated to New York and Palestine. When I was between ten and twelve, we received many letters from Uncle Benny, inviting us to come to New York, and offering to help us get a Visa.

"It's very goyish," Father said each time a move to New York was discussed. "I don't want to bring up my family in America." My father had strength, but the wrong kind, saying we would stay, believing that since Belgium had said it would remain neutral, things would be safe for us. Our family would stay in Belgium. We still trusted.

Shulum

Father came from a large, religious family. He was what people today would call modern Orthodox, as he did not wear a beard, but he always wore a yarmulke and had a black hat for outdoors. In Europe, these clothes identified him as a Jew. Every morning, before breakfast, he would put his tefillin pouch under his arm, and go down the block to the synagogue, for morning prayers. On the way there, he'd meet his friends, to form a minyan. Once in a while, I'd join him, if I felt miserable or wanted his company.

I was his favorite child. Even though girls weren't allowed in the synagogue, Father would hide me under his prayer shawl and take me to morning prayers. He was reassuring, as he'd occasionally squeeze my arm or shoulder during the prayers. Then we'd go home.

I would overhear my parents talking about us, and Mamma seemed to favor Clara, saying Clara was prettier. But to Father, I was the portrait and namesake of his mother's mother, his grandmother, who he'd adored as a child.

Father delivered soda to his clients in a wagon, and when I was smaller, he'd put me in the wagon and bring me to school. Because I was a scrawny little child, I was often sick, and Father took me to the doctor for different kinds of treatments. He offered me candy all the time, and took me for walks in the park.

At night, Father would again go to shul with his friends, and afterwards, he'd bring his friends over to discuss Buber's theories. When I look back on those times, I remember thinking that Buber was another biblical figure, like Moses or Isaac or Ruth, and it was only as an adult that I learned that Buber was a contemporary Jewish scholar.

Before meals, Father always said a blessing. There was a split between our parents, as Mama didn't follow or believe in Jewish customs as Father did. He always ignored Mama's snickers. He overlooked Mama's habit of locking herself in the bathroom on Shabbat to have a cigarette.

"Oh, my little goyta," Father would sometimes tease Mama, "you're not Jewish!" Mama somehow managed to keep our home strictly kosher, but she was not a fanatic about it. Father was so in love with her, that anything she did was all right.

They still sang "Happy Birthday"

I liked to walk home from school with my girlfriends; we'd gossip or sing or just skip along. I enjoyed the sunshine all around me. One day, when my friends and I were a few short blocks away from my house, I saw Father walking towards us.

"There's Father! Good-bye, Mona, Greta!" I rushed to hug Father, but he grabbed me by the arm.

"Hurry up, Tekitsa, come inside at once!" Father said.

At fourteen, a command tended to make me do the opposite. I stopped and searched his face.

"We can't talk out here," Father whispered. "Let's go inside. Germany has declared war on us, and on France."

Immediately I rushed into our home with Father, and I'll never forget the date, May 10, 1940, because I was planning a big party for my birthday on the fifteenth. Everyone was gathered in our living room, and Mama was rolling

cigarettes. For several days, we talked and talked. It seemed like we stayed in the living room, worrying and discussing what to do, at least four days.

One day, several friends from Hashomer came to visit.

"We're lucky we're alive," Leon said, hugging Mama, then Clara, then me.

"We tried to flee to Switzerland, to then go to Palestine," another boy said. I knew about this plan and had wanted to join the escape party.

"It's too late. We left too late," Leon said. The Germans caught us and escorted us home to Antwerp."

By May 14, we could hear bombs exploding in the distance as we talked. There were no signs yet of the invasion, but we heard on the radio that Germany had declared war on Belgium. We kept our radio playing nonstop, and heard announcements calling for Belgian soldiers to fight, schools to be closed, and other war alerts.

As the day went on neighbors and friends continued to drop in for minutes or hours, discussing their fears, hopes and plans. Some of our neighbors were afraid to go to their homes. Mama and Father believed we had to do something, soon. Things looked bad, but we knew this was just the beginning.

"I wish we could go to Uncle Emile and Sziga, to Palestine," Mama sighed. "It sounds like it would be impossible for us to go there now."

"It took them months to get there, according to their letter," Clara reminded everyone, though we'd been over this many times over the past few days. "They said that their boat was always getting stopped by the British."

"I'm sure they are worried about us," Heshey said.

"We are going to go to Le Havre, a French port, and see if we can get on a boat to Britain or anywhere away from here," Shulum said. "With God's blessings. Now go pack."

Clara and I still shared a room. She was pacing more than she was packing, and hardly could settle down.

"I don't know what to bring. We'll have to leave so much behind. What about your piano?"

"I'm just lucky, I guess, that I have memorized most of my music," I said. "I've packed my diary, and my favorite pictures. I hope we can get to Palestine. That's my dream."

"Who knows. And Mama said maybe the British and French will root out the Germans and kill them. What about your birthday party? And aren't you scared?"

"I'll have other parties, I hope. I'm worried about Father and Heshey. What if they have to join the army? What will we do then?"

"Oh Freide, that is so stupid! Heshey is too young to be called up, and Father, too old."

I smiled at her and she bent to fold some clothes. When she turned her back, I stuck my tongue out at her. Heshey was already 18.

Defeats and Surrenders

Packed into Father's delivery truck, a small red truck with a soda logo and the words, "Heller Bottled Soda: Antwerp's Best Seltzer," we headed south and west towards the port.

"I wish we had listened to Emile or Sziga, or even to Benny. They are safe and sound in Palestine, in New York," Mama said quietly to Father.

"What is done, is done, Baruch Hashem, as God has willed it, Rosa. Your brothers and mine are safe, but God is watching us and will take care of us."

"Mama, since we are hardly moving, can Ilie and I walk along side the truck?"

Mama looked at Shulum, who nodded. "Stay close to the truck, children," Father said, and my brother and I climbed out. The highway was overflowing with trucks, vehicles, even little wagons and bicycles, all loaded up. Refugees were walking, with parents in front and children following them. There were many people running from Antwerp, and not just Jews. The traffic moved about two or three miles per hour, so we had no trouble keeping up with our truck. It became scary when the bombing started, and Mama insisted that we sit in the truck at those times, but then it would grow quiet again. Mama told us the bombs were from Germany, Belgium and France, and the explosions seemed far away.

The traffic gradually slowed to a stop. I heard Mama and Father discussing what to do. As always, when they didn't want us children to know what they were saying, they spoke in Hungarian.

"Children, each of you take a few possessions," Mama ordered. "We're going to leave our truck for now, and find a place to sleep."

Walking with Clara, I followed behind our parents and brothers. It seemed like thousands of people were walking or sitting in the stilled vehicles along the road. We saw a small creek and I noticed we would be walking over its bridge soon. I linked my arm through Clara's as we continued.

"Hello, girls," a priest said. He wore traditional dress and walked along next to us with two men. "Where have you come from? Are you all alone, just the two of you?"

"No, we are from Antwerp, come with our parents and brothers who are just up ahead," Clara said. "Where are you from?"

"I'm from Brussels, and I am headed to the front, to help our army," the priest said.

"You are so brave, to join the army," I said.

The priest told us he was going to join the BEF, which was the Belgian army and some of the French army, working together, on the Belgian border. Then he introduced us to the men walking next to him, friends who were enlisting with him.

"Nice to meet you! We're Clara and Freide."

"How is our army doing?" Clara asked.

"Get into the dugouts!" Someone screamed. Clara shrieked and I held onto her.

"Get down, girls," the priest shouted. "Keep your head down or you'll be dead in a minute!"

Clara and I jostled each other, trying to protect each other and push each other down to safety on the road. Falling on top of each other, we heard screams. As several bombs seemed to explode practically before my eyes, I saw tiny pieces of things, blood or body parts, flying before me. The priest scrambled down the bank beside the bridge, looking for his two friends, but there was nothing left of either man.

"Help me, I'm hit," Clara screamed. "I'm bleeding. Help me!"

"Clara's gonna die. Clara's gonna die!" I cried, and Mama came running. She tore off part of Clara's dress where it was bloodied.

"Oh, it doesn't look bad, Clara," Mama said. Some of the blood on Clara's dress was not hers. Together we supported Clara, who was terribly shaken.

A little bit ahead was a Red Cross shelter. It wasn't truly a Red Cross place, but priests there were trying to help the injured people.

"You can't go in there," an attendant told us. "There is no space, not even for these badly wounded people. We're going to work on them out here."

At a nearby wash pump, Mama washed the small wound on Clara's back, which didn't need stitches but seemed to bleed a lot.

"Does it hurt you anywhere else, Clara?" Mama asked.

"Oh Mama, I'm so scared," Clara said. "I feel faint!"

A day later, we were in the bordering area of France, still walking along the road, dusty, disheveled, and exhausted. Ahead, Father knocked on the door of a French country farmhouse.

"Hello," Father said when a young farmer answered the door. "Do you have a room for my family and I to sleep, for one night? We would be glad to pay you, even to sleep in your barn. We are Jews, hoping to get passage on a boat to England tomorrow morning."

"I'll check with my wife, if you'll excuse me a moment."

A few hours later, it was with relief that we were sitting in the farmer's kitchen, watching the farmer's eight children run wildly around the dirty house. The kitchen sink overflowed with unwashed dishes, while pots cooking on the stove showed crummy, caked exteriors. The farmer's plump wife, in a large, stained apron, held her three-year-old daughter while she talked to Mama.

"This is Elyse, but don't expect her to speak. She never does. She can never do anything right! She is stupid and clumsy, but we love her anyway." She said.

"That's a shame," Mama said. "The poor little girl. We'd like to go wash ourselves, if you'll excuse us. Thank you again for your kindness, hospitality, for letting us stay here."

"Oh, it's nothing," she said. "You're welcome."

We all headed out the door. As I left, I overheard the woman talking to herself, but I don't think Mama or the others heard.

"The dirty Jews always have to wash their dirty children!"

At the water pump, Mama was already helping Ilie and the others wash. Mama always liked to say, "cleanliness is close to Godliness," which comes out of the Old Testament, I believe. A few of the farmer's children stood by, watching.

"I bet you, that little Elyse hasn't had a bath since the day she was born," Mama said. "That's why she can't hear anything: she's probably got dirty ears!"

"Well, Mama, if you think that, I'm going to wash her face and ears," I exclaimed. "Then you won't have to speculate anymore."

I grabbed the little girl, who willingly came with me and let me splash her with water and scrub her gently.

"Now, doesn't it feel good to be clean?" I said softly, smiling at her chubby little face with its friendly blue eyes. Suddenly, her face brightened, and she looked more alert.

"Ga, gooo," Elyse said merrily, then rushed off into the house to her mother.

"Ma-ma Mamma!" Elyse shouted, running into her mother's arms.

"Elyse? Why, you're talking! My dear child!" The farmer's wife looked like she was ready to faint.

The next morning, we walked back to the highway, and our truck was as we'd left it, totally intact. We climbed in, and the traffic was now moving; within the day, we arrived at the Le Havre port. After a few hours, Father was second in the line for tickets. We each grabbed some luggage, and stood together in the middle of the station, waiting. I leaned against a suitcase and wrote in my diary for a while.

"I would like to purchase three tickets to England, for myself, my wife and my son," said the man ahead of Father. "How much will the tickets cost?"

"I'm sorry, sir, but there are no spaces left for today's trip to England," the ticket-seller said.

"I need to leave here this week," the man continued. "Don't you have tickets for later in the week?"

"Sorry, sir. We don't know how much longer we can provide voyages out of this port. Next?"

"Then there is nothing we can do," the man said as he walked away. "This is terrible!"

"Do you have passage available to the United States, or anywhere else?" Father asked.

"No, sir, I'm sorry. Everything is sold out already. Come back tomorrow. Perhaps things will be different . . ."

"Why is it this way?" Father asked.

"Don't you realize?" The ticket-seller said. "There are many Belgians like yourself who would like to get out."

Father looked dazed when he returned to us, and after he told us what had happened, we were devastated.

"Mama, what are we going to do now?" Clara asked.

"Children, we will find a way," Mama said.

"God has always taken care of us," Father said. "He will continue to do so, Baruch Hashem."

Suddenly, screaming and crying is heard, and people begin to panic. A loud noise is heard, then we saw groups of German soldiers coming around from many directions.

"Belgian citizens," a German soldier spoke into a megaphone, and dismayed, I sat down again to listen. "We are your friends. We will not harm you. Your country is not in danger. We would like all citizens to return to their homes immediately."

"We come with good will, Belgian citizens. We speak your language and will not harm you. Please go back to your homes."

The soldier repeated this message over and over, as stunned Belgians looked around at each other and began to leave. Two soldiers came over to Father.

"Come with us," one soldier said in German. "We're not going to harm you. We just want you to go back to your homes and start normal daily lives."

Mama and Father glanced at each other, and Father nodded.

"Children, take your things. We are going to return home to Antwerp."

The date was May 18, 1940, three days after my fifteenth birthday.

Chapter 4

Star of David

Despite the hardships of the German occupation, Mom told me that her family, still intact, celebrated a beautiful Chanukah in 1941. Everyone sang the candle blessings and enjoyed the festive meal which my grandmother scrounged somehow from meager war rations.

They sang about dreidels, Yiddish Chanukah songs, and "Rock of Ages."

Heshey gave Clara, Freide, and Ilie silver Jewish stars, each on a chain, that he had made at school. Mom still has hers, a precious keepsake from her darling older brother.

My two brothers and I all went to a Habonim summer camp, Camp Galil in Pennsylvania, and Mom instilled in us a deep sense of our Jewish identities. Each of us became intensely Zionist, seeking Israel in very individualized ways. There's a powerful sense of dedication to Judaism's tenets that we proudly inherited, manifest differently for each of us. It's clearly evident in the loving households and spirituality in both of my brothers' homes.

Writing Mom's story has been very important to us. My brother Heshi, who is seven years older than I, recently asked me what I'd learned about Heshey. Our oldest brother, Shalom was named after our grandfather Shulum. I, on the other hand, was named after my father's mother. As a teenager, Marian Esther immigrated to the United States sometime before 1920, escaping pogroms in Hungary. Once here, she met my grandfather, Isadore Gorewitz, a Russian immigrant who was orphaned by pogroms in his homeland. I know very little

about my father's mother, but he's often told me how hard she worked to make ends meet, and how much she cared for others.

I haven't read much of the research and literature on children of survivors, yet I've heard that a child who is of the same gender as the parent who is a survivor will often over-identify with that parent. Perhaps that's part of the reason I dropped out of college for a few years, and needed therapy.

During six years of therapy with about that many different psychiatrists, analysts and therapists, not one person asked me about my mother or about my childhood experiences. No one, including myself, had a clue about the pain and horror buried in my soul.

One of the strangest, awfullest memories I have still embarrasses me, as it reveals how terribly snoopy I can be. I loved to snoop around and look inside my brother's or my mother's desks and nothing was off-limits if I knew no one was watching. When I was around five or six years old, I found a bundle of photos that I'm sure I shouldn't have looked at. My father's brother Hymie was one of the United States Army's official photographers, and he took photos of General Eisenhower as well as of several concentration camps being liberated. When I came upon them, I didn't understand these horrifying photos of emaciated men, women, and children, but something burned, ached and throbbed inside my chest. I shoved them back into the drawer and ran to my room.

Antwerp in German Hands

When we returned home, our house was just as we'd left it. I had just turned fifteen years old, and felt relieved to be home. I thought, all right, I can go back to

school and back to my singing. Everything seemed to return to normal; we all returned to school and Father went back to work.

Mona, my best friend, used to come to my house, or I'd go to her house. She was such an intelligent, good girl, with the best grades in school. Together, we took long walks in the sunshine, had long talks, listened to music on the radio, and looked for boys: all the regular teenage activities! Mona and I often double-dated or just went out with boys from Hashomer.

Some of my Hashomer friends wanted to try to flee again, to go to Switzerland, then to Palestine, and some of the youth successfully made this journey. I didn't think of going. At that point, I couldn't see myself being away from my family.

Things gradually changed for us in Belgium, as the Germans implemented the same "master plan" they had used in Germany and Poland. These changes did not happen simultaneously throughout Europe, although Hitler's forces enforced similar anti-Semitic tactics wherever they went. We didn't know how it was going to be, and there was a lot of debate about what would happen.

One night, a few months later, Oscar took me out to dinner. We walked around Antwerp, holding hands and talking as we looked for a restaurant. A number of the businesses we passed were labeled or marked with many types of crude, hand-lettered signs. Some said "Jewish business here," or "Jewish owned business."

"That's the third restaurant with a sign like that," Oscar said, pointing at the sign, "Jews and Dogs Not Allowed."

"Do you want to walk a few more blocks?"

"Freide, I wanted to take you to a nice restaurant, but it seems like the only place we can eat is going to be a hole in the ground," Oscar said.

"What is that movie that is advertised there, 'The Eternal Jew?' Do you know anything about it?"

"I'll tell you more during the Hashomer meeting later. We shouldn't talk about this in the streets," Oscar said, as he glanced at several German soldiers standing at the end of the block.

"Well, I'd love some French-fried potatoes. You know they are my favorite. We can take them and eat in the park. Just promise you won't tell everyone what a cheap date I am!" I said, trying to make light of the situation.

Later, at our Hashomer meeting, Leon led a current events discussion. A few weeks earlier, all Jewish families had been provided with yellow Jewish star patches, which we were required to sew on the outside of our garments. As I looked around, I saw the friends I loved and knew so well, their stars neatly sewn, their eyes intense.

"Let's go around the room," Leon said, "and see how you feel about what is happening. Helda, will you please start?"

Helda said, "My family wants to go to Switzerland, and my older brother has tried to join the Resistance. I don't understand his courage: how can he even think about being in the spy group, the underground? I feel afraid just walking to school."

"Right now, school is hard for my brothers and I because our old goyish friends don't talk to us anymore." A tall, blond-haired boy next to Helda spoke. "I'm mad because we weren't allowed on the soccer team because the coaches are afraid to let Jewish people participate."

"I'm not going to wear this star any longer," I said, and ripped the star off my shirt. Mama had sewn it there about a week earlier. When I'd pulled it off, only a few scraps of thread revealed where it had been.

"Freide! What will your parents say?" Mona asked. "Won't they be angry with you?"

"Why, Freide?" Oscar asked. "It's our Magen David, our Jewish star. You should be proud of it!"

"It makes me a target for miles, in the street," I said, quietly raging. "I'm sure that my parents will speak to me, and they will be angry. But I refuse to be a target. Besides, you know what? I wear my Magen David in my heart; that's where God is for me." I thought of my silver star which Heshey had made. It hung on my necklace, under my blouse.

"My mother says soon the Germans will be closing all of our Jewish stores and businesses," another teenager said. "That's what they did in Poland: my uncle told us what had happened before he and his family fled from there."

"Jews aren't allowed to go to the movies, and I heard this morning that we won't be permitted to study medicine or law," Heshey added. "It's unbelievable, to me."

"It seems to me that some Belgians believe in the propaganda," someone else said. "Like the movie, 'Eternal Jew" they are showing, and the radio broadcasts that encourage everyone to be against us. I don't know what the film says about Jews, exactly, but I know it's not good things. But there are also Belgians, plenty of whom aren't Jewish, working in the Resistance movement."

"Some people like to have the Germans here, but some will do whatever they can to help bring Belgium back to the Belgians," someone said.

"There has to be a way we can leave, too," I said, watching my friends. "I hope my family and I can find a way to get to Palestine." All my friends, who had seemed so daring and brave during our hikes and endurance exercises, were so afraid now. I sighed and listened as the discussion continued.

"One of my brother's friends, who is almost finished studying medicine," Helda said, "was told a few days ago that now he is not allowed to attend the medical school. What are the Germans trying to do? What are they afraid of?"

"Freide, I want you to put your star back on," Mona said as we were leaving. I hugged and kissed her, stuck my chin out a little, and went home with Heshey.

Diamonds in the Street

Within a year, Germans had begun to raid Jewish businesses. They started with the diamond district, which was about two blocks from our house. On my way to school one morning, I saw men, some of them Father's friends, walking to work, then being surrounded by Germans. Suddenly, the ground was covered with sparkling, shiny stars, as the Germans forced these away from the diamond brokers. I just kept walking, going to school.

Soon, the Germans started to close up other Jewish businesses. They'd put up more signs, or tell people not to buy from Jews.

Lights Out!

German soldiers used to come into our house and factory to buy soda. Each time, we were scared. Once, four Germans came in. We were reading or doing homework, and Mama was cooking dinner.

"We're here just for soda," one soldier said, then he saw my piano. "Who plays the piano?" He asked Mama. Another soldier sipped his soda and leaned against the wall, watching.

"Freide, my younger daughter, plays quite well," Mama said.

"Well, Freide," the soldier said, "you better play for us."

I was frightened, but Mama nodded and I sat. A Brahms lullaby was propped in front of my other music, and without thinking, I played it.

"Ah, you're okay," a soldier said. "Why don't you . . ."

I jumped slightly when the lights suddenly went out. I could hear the men raising their weapons and releasing the safety triggers.

"We're going to shoot you all," one of the soldiers shouted. "Don't move."

"Officer," Mama said, gently, "you put out that light, yourself, by leaning against the light switch on the wall."

"Ah, you are right," he said, as he reached behind him and turned the light on again. Embarrassed, the soldiers quickly left.

"If a German soldier ever touches me, I'll die on the spot," Clara said.

Mama told us to return to our schoolwork, and she kissed or hugged each of us. We considered ourselves very lucky.

Father in Danger

Sometime before we went into hiding, Father received a summons to go to the police, the German Gestapo. They claimed he was playing cards in the middle of Kyserlie Straat, in the hub of Antwerp. We knew that once you go there, you may never come out. Mama tore up the summons and we felt got away with that.

A neighbor came to our house one evening shortly after.

"Rosa," the man said. "The Gestapo took and arrested Shulum!"

"Arrested my Shulum?" Mama said, shaken. "For what? Tell me!"

"They said he was gambling for diamonds, playing cards in the middle of the street."

Mama sat down and reached for a cigarette, her hands unsteady as she lit the match. My brothers, sister and I looked at each other.

"My husband wouldn't do that! Why would they say he did that?"

"Mama," I said. "Let me go with you to the police. I'm sure we can find a way to bring him home."

When we arrived at the Belgian police station, we must have looked like wrecks. Both of us were crying, and Mama's eyes were red-rimmed.

"Listen, ladies," the policeman said. "Explain to me what Mr. Heller was doing on the street this morning."

"He would have been on the way to deliver soda, or to a business meeting," Mama said, sobbing.

"Calm down, Mrs. Heller. We received reports about your husband's activities."

"What kind of reports?" I asked, reaching for Mama's hand. "My father is a respected businessman—you know his factory! Please Officer, let him come home."

"I'll see what I can do," the policeman said, ruffling through some files on his desk. "He is not the first Jew who's been arrested and put in jail this week."

"What do you mean?" Mama asked.

"In confidence to you, madam," the policeman whispered, "I'm just saying that the German supervisor has given us orders to arrest certain Jewish citizens. We Belgians have very little say anymore about these things, you probably know. We have to follow our orders to stay alive."

"What about my father? He didn't do anything, I'm sure!"

"Freide, it is war time," he said. "We have to follow our orders. But I haven't had any orders to detain Mr. Heller after today. I'll see what I can do to release him first thing tomorrow morning."

I squeezed Mama's hand, and she seemed to collapse slightly against me. The policeman lead us, crying, from the room, we went home, and Father was released, as promised, the following day. After that, Father was very cautious about where he went and who he met with, giving Mama details about his whereabouts for each day.

Food for Thought

School continued for a little while longer. A few of my Jewish friends had managed to leave Belgium, but most remained. We were closer than ever, as now, the non-Jewish children were afraid to play or even talk to Jews.

Our teacher was an anti-German sympathizer, and I remember her telling us about the war. On a map, she showed us how the Germans had taken over our city, and other cities in Belgium and Europe. She also passed out anti-German, pro-Belgium pamphlets.

"Girls, listen very carefully," our teacher said one day, standing before us as prim and proper as ever. "I want to tell you something important. If a German comes up to you, tries to bother you, you must know what to do, and how to act. Smile at him as nicely as you can, then pick up your right foot, bend your leg at the knee, and keep smiling. As fast as you can, push your right knee into his testicles, and run, run away, as fast as you can!"

"There's too many Germans," I whispered to Greta. "Kicking them will never work." Greta turned her head and leaned away from me.

"Oh, I forgot," I muttered to myself. "It's not good to talk to Jewish girls anymore." I smiled at Mona, on the other side of the classroom, who just nodded slightly and went on with her work.

Mr. Yaegar appeared in the doorway, and we all sat up straighter. He and the teacher whispered to each other for a minute or two, and then he left.

"Mr. Yaegar, your principal, has just told me that some German soldiers are here to inspect our classrooms," the teacher said. "Don't be afraid, girls."

"Oh no," one girl said.

"I'm scared," one of the Jewish girls cried.

"Quiet! Quickly, girls: eat the pamphlets I distributed earlier," the teacher said, and each girl picked up the pamphlet on her desk. "The Germans will not be happy to see that we are planning to fight back. Eat them, quickly, and no talking!"

It was silent in the room as the teacher ripped up two undistributed pamphlets, chewed and swallowed them, and all around the room were girls eating paper. It was dry and hard to swallow, but within a few minutes, we heard Germans marching down the hallway. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the terrified expression on Mona's face. Several soldiers stopped by our classroom door.

"What a very fine classroom," one soldier said, looking around at us.

"It is, isn't it?" said another soldier. "Teach the young girls to be good, loyal German soldiers." Our teacher smiled and nodded, but as soon as she could, she closed the classroom door and began a history lesson.

A few weeks later, the first week of May, 1942, Jewish children were told not to attend their schools anymore. Mr. Yaegar called me to his office on our last day there. He saw that I was upset about not being allowed to continue school.

"It is what you take with you, what you have in your head," Mr. Yaegar said. His kindness to me helped me feel more self-confident.

New Losses

My music was a bit of hope in a dark time. One day Liza tried to convince me to stop coming to her, but although I didn't go as often, I couldn't stop my voice lessons entirely.

"You can't keep coming for voice lessons," Liza said, "especially if my husband is around. He is collaborating with the Germans."

Mr. Von Aden suddenly walked into the room. He was a famous baritone in Antwerp, and he tended to strut into the room, full of himself. At times, he was cruel to Liza in word or deed.

"I don't want you to come to my house anymore," he said that day. "Just don't come here." Liza nodded to me that my lesson had ended, and I grabbed my bike and headed off into the city.

Even though Father didn't approve, I was also still singing for Sunday masses. One day, while singing high up in the choir loft of the cathedral, I saw several high-ranking German officers sitting with Mr. Yaegar. I told Mama about it afterwards.

"What did Mr. Yaegar say to you," Mama asked.

"He told me not to sing in the church anymore," I said, crying while I tried to play piano. "He also said he had told the Germans that I am Jewish."

"I suppose he was showing off to the Germans?" Mama said.

"Tekitsa, God willing, you'll have many more chances to sing," Father said, entering the room.

"Father, you don't understand. I need to sing—it's everything to me."

"A Jewish girl has no good reason, and no place, to sing in church, anyway!" Father said. "You know your mother and I didn't approve of your singing there. If you had only listened to us, you wouldn't have sung there in the first place."

"Father, what are you talking about? I have to have music! It doesn't matter what or where I sing, as long as I sing!" I know it was early evening, and it seemed like everything was growing dark around me.

The doorbell rang, and without waiting for us to answer the door, a German soldier entered the house, walked up to Father, and handed him an envelope. The soldier nodded to Mama and me, turned sharply on his heel and left.

"Such chutzpah!" Mama whispered fearfully, "to just walk into our home like he owned it! Nu? Open it—what is it? What do they want now?"

After skimming the letter, Father slowly lowered himself into a chair to read it. The silence ached as we waited.

"It says, 'We request that Heshey Heller report immediately to the Dossin Kazerne work camp, in the town of Mechelen . . . if he reports promptly, we will leave your family alone . . . We want young men who are strong and can work. This is for your own good . . .'" Father put the letter down, and I took it from him.

"No." Mama gasped. "Not Heshey. I won't let anyone take him. I won't let him go."

"Mama," Heshey said, "I'm in good condition from playing soccer! I can work hard, and if it will help the rest of the family, I want to go."

"No." Mama said.

"Remember the last Hashomer meeting," I asked. "You heard what people said: that the Germans are hurting and killing many people. Sometimes they kill people just because they are Jews."

"Yes," Heshey said, "but at that same meeting, someone else said that no one has any proof. The Germans here in Antwerp do seem mean, but they can't possibly be that cruel. To just kill someone for being Jewish—that's insane."

"Heshey, listen to me," Father said. "I agree with Mama. I don't want you to go. We need to stay together, keep our family as one. If you leave . . ."

"Father, wait," Heshey said. "This is my decision. I need to go. I'd rather work, take some action, since we're not allowed to go to school anymore. Besides, this is how I can help our family. They've promised you'll be safer if I go, and I want to protect you. Let me read that."

"Heshey, you remember Borsa more than your sisters and Ilie do," Mama said. "Do you remember how the Romanians beat, raped, and killed many Jewish people, many of our friends there? I know you were young, then, but we stayed together. We must stay together now."

"Mama, this is different," Heshey insisted.

"You still believe the Germans do things for us, for our well-being?" I asked. "Being Jewish, we have to wear stars, and we're not allowed to go to school. Jewish businesses are being destroyed. We've heard rumors that worse things happened and are happening to other European Jews. How can any of this be for my own good, or yours?"

We continued to discuss this for a few weeks, but Heshey insisted on following the orders of the letter. He believed it would help our family, and he also had been very unhappy once we were removed from school. In May 1942, Heshey left for the Dossin Kazerne work camp in Mechelen. Many other Jewish young men received the same letter, including my friends Leo Appel and Oscar Brenner, who came to say good-bye to us. They left together, and then we received a

postcard from Heshey when he first arrived in Mechelen. I never saw my brother Heshey again.

Kristalnacht, Friday, July 22, 1942 (Belgium)

Sabbath quiet had settled over our home, and together we tried to enjoy this peace during war. Even though Heshey had been gone for two months, we were constantly thinking of him, and I missed hearing him sing Kiddush over the wine. I know Mama and Father were trying not to talk about how worried they were, but even after the war ended, Mama still looked and hoped for his return to us.

Clara and Ilie were reading by the light of Sabbath candles halfway burnt down, and Mama listened while I sang softly of Jerusalem. Suddenly, we were startled by loud noises from the street, and I jumped up from the piano and ran to the window. Father came to stand beside me.

I saw Gestapo trucks flow down the street, their sirens howling at full volume. Soldiers jumped off the trucks, and many began to shoot their guns. I heard screaming, which seemed to come from all around us. I heard the sound of glass breaking, and saw soldiers and civilians throwing rocks at windows. I was overwhelmed by fear, and in my mind, over and over, thought, "not on Shabbat. No, not on Shabbat!"

Like ants, Gestapo and Belgian soldiers marched all over, along with civilians, knocking at houses. I saw a soldiers drag people out of their houses. A group of soldiers went inside our shul down the block, and minutes later, they were throwing the Torah and other religious articles out onto the street. Others set these aflame and soon fires were all around. After a while, someone set the shul itself on fire, and it burnt down to the ground.

"Not the Torah!" Father cried softly. "Oh, not here in Belgium. Adonai, wasn't Romania enough?"

Tears were running down his face. I gulped—I had never seen Father cry. I wanted to comfort him despite the terror in my heart. I saw more soldiers, and they were marching our neighbors and other people to trucks. I saw flames against the dark night and my body shook.

"It's not a time for crying," Mama said. "We have to see what's going on."

I put my hand on Father's arm, and was about to speak when several Gestapo soldiers banged on our front door. Mama lit a cigarette, and Clara went to sit next to her. At the table, Ilie closed his book and hid Father's silver Kiddush cup.

"Open the door, now!" The soldiers shouted. "We'll break it down if we have to."

"Yes, just one minute," Father said. "I'm coming to open the door."

I rushed to sit next to Mama, and Father opened the door slowly for about three or four Gestapo soldiers, who pushed him back and pointed their guns at us. The spread themselves around the room, looking at everything and everyone.

"Show your papers," one of them demanded.

"Here, sir. We are Romanian citizens," Father said, as he pulled our passport papers out of the bureau, moving as if he were in shock. He handed them to one of the soldiers, who barely looked at them before handing them back.

"Oh, Romanian? You can stay here. We are not taking Romanians today."

They quickly marched out, and we sat in silence, listening to the horrors around us. Soon, there was screaming from upstairs within our building.

"The Haimowitz family, upstairs," Mama whispered. "Why are they being taken? They've never bothered anyone."

"It's that movie they showed," Ilie said. "It was called 'The Eternal Jew,' and it makes the gentiles hate us, fiercely hate hate us! And the Haimowitzs are very religious Jews."

"God will protect the Haimowitz family, Rosa. Don't worry."

Mama replied in Hungarian, and for a few minutes, they continued to discuss something. I went back to the window, trying to stay hidden behind the curtain. I heard the soldiers dragging people out of the Haimowitz apartment. Soon, I saw it was Mr. Haimowitz, then Mrs. Haimowitz and the children.

"I want my little girl with me!" Mrs. Haimowitz screamed loudly.

"No, you can't have her," the soldier replied, roughly slapping and hitting her. "She's going in a different truck."

We were stunned. You can't function when this happens around you. I saw Gestapo soldiers separate mothers and children from fathers and older boys, and put them in separate trucks. A man protested, and a soldier brutally beat him with a gun until the man fell down, probably dead. One woman who cried out had her clothes ripped off of her, then she was beaten, punched, and thrown on the ground. The soldiers seemed to do whatever they wanted for any reason, and I finally had to turn away. There was altogether about two hours of horror in the streets by our home until finally, the trucks and soldiers left, carrying away a good part of Antwerp's Jewish community.

"We can't stay here. They'll come back for us," Father said in Yiddish. "They won't leave us, just because we're Romanian."

"Children, gather by me," Mama said. "Each of you must quickly pack a very small bag. Then choose some clothes that you can wear, and put a few sets of clothes on, one on top of the other, so you are wearing a few layers of clothing.

You may each also choose and pack one special momento that you cherish and can't bear to leave behind. Now hurry!"

As Clara and I packed in our room, I thought I heard a noise.

"Do you hear something, like a baby crying?" I asked.

"I think I hear something," Clara said. She was afraid, and I could see her holding back tears. She sat on the bed and put her head in her hands.

"I'm going to ask Mama something," I said, and ran from the room.

Mama told me to be very careful, so I tiptoed cautiously up the inner stairs to the Haimowitz apartment. She followed behind me, and we found the apartment door hanging open. I heard a muffled whimpering noise, and peered around the room, shining a candle. Cowering under one of the beds, I found four-year-old Hannah.

"It's me, Hannah," I said softly to the little girl I had often baby-sat.

"Mama told me to stay here and be very quiet," Hannah said, crying and rubbing her nose. "When will she be back for me?

Chapter 5

Unasked and Unanswered

In 1979, I traveled to Israel with my family for Heshi's wedding. One of the many jokes the rabbi told at the wedding told that Heshi had to go all the way to Israel to meet his wife-to-be, Caryn. When they were growing up in New York and New Jersey, they lived less than fifty miles apart. Another gulf in their upbringing was that Caryn was very involved with Young Judaea youth group, and Heshi belonged to Habonim and eventually became first a camp director, then a regional director.

In Israel, I worked briefly on Kibbutz Gezer where Heshi and Caryn lived; after many discussions with others there, someone urged me to talk to my mother and grandmother about their life experiences. I didn't get it. What was it I was to talk about? On one level, I understood, but the silence had always been there. Why should I be the one to break or perhaps shatter it?

I did try once to talk to Bubby, although I didn't know the questions.

"What was it like during the war?"

"It was scary. We were scared. There was a lot of bombing."

I suppose, looking back now, I should have written a list of questions, like I do now with my mother. After that first question, I was stumped. Our conversations went back to the old routine.

"What can I get you at the supermarket, Bubby?"

"Are you hungry, Marian? Here, I just baked these cheese cookies. Try one."

Bubby died in 1987, and when she comes to me in dreams, I feel her love only. I'll never know her side of the story as a wife and mother.

The Abandoned Factory

None of us slept on Kristol Nacht. As I lay in bed in the dark silence, holding the sleeping Hannah Haimowitz, I could still hear the windows shattering, my neighbors screaming, and the brutal commands of Gestapo soldiers. In the corner of our room, two small bags, our schoolbags, were packed and ready, and before dawn, Mama poked her head into our room.

"We are going to leave as soon as curfew ends at six o'clock," Mama said. She spoke in a hushed whisper, and from then on, I believe none of our voices rose above a whisper until the war ended.

Clara sat up in bed, and I went to sit with her. I was shocked by the heavy, brooding circles under her eyes, then caught a glimpse in the mirror of my own pale, anxious face. I patted my sister and went to the kitchen.

"We'll be going to the abandoned flour factory, Freide," Mama said. She was alone in the kitchen, packing food essentials. "Remind your sister and brother to wear as many clothes as possible, because we don't want to carry much or draw any attention to ourselves."

"What about if Heshey comes back? How will he find us?"

"He will find us, don't worry. Now go get Ilie and Clara, and have them take their stars off their clothes."

At six, Mama took Ilie to the factory. Soon afterwards, Clara and I went together. On the outside, the building looked old but well preserved. Inside, we were dismayed by the disarray of huge wooden barrels, broken and crumbling. Off

to one side, what might once have been an assembly line looked like jumbled scraps of wood, plastic, and metal. Father came to meet us shortly afterwards.

"It is not like our beautiful home," Father said, "but God willing, we will be safe here."

"Keep moving around, or the rats will bite you," Mama warned us. "Let's take turns sitting and protecting each other from the vermin."

"This would be fun, like cops and robbers, except it is real life," Ilie said, and he sat and tried to read.

"Do we really have to stay here?" Clara asked. "I want to lie down, I'm so tired."

"You lie down and rest, Clara," Mama said. "Don't worry, there will be people who will help us, so we won't stay here long. Right, Father?"

"God will help us," Father said. "We are not going to stay here very long. In fact, I am going to leave for a while now, and see if I can find a better hiding place for us."

"Where will you go, Father?" I asked.

"I am going to see Mr. Yaegar first. He is a good friend and perhaps he can find us a safe place to hide."

Father left, and we spent the rest of the day taking turns sleeping and watching the rats and mice ogle our food. Empty flour and cookie vats seemed to be full of scampering, squeaking vermin, and cockroaches crawled around us. We also took turns taking care of Hannah, who was cranky and unhappy. At nightfall, when Father still had not returned, Mama tried to hide her worry.

"No one can go to sleep," Mama warned us. "We can't trust the rats, who may attack us. If anyone is tired, we can take turns closing our eyes."

It was dark and spooky, but we were afraid to make any light in the deserted factory. We huddled together and rested, and I remember walking around, very tired but afraid of the rats.

Early the next morning, Father finally returned.

"Mr. Yaegar has a place for us to hide," Father said. "Tonight before seven o'clock curfew we'll all go to meet him. I have arranged where to find him, and he is going to take us to stay with the Addams family."

"Do we know this family?" Mama asked.

"No, but God willing, we will find safety in their home."

Hiding Passively is Unacceptable

Traveling by trolley in pairs, we separately went to our new hiding place. Clara and I went together, and Ilie went with Mama. Last, Father followed us. Where just yesterday I had seen many Jews in the streets, I noticed no one wearing a star. I didn't know how many Jews had been taken.

Our new home was in a very damp basement in a lower income section of Antwerp. Mr. Addams, a trolley car operator, lived with his wife and five children in a poor but nice little house. Mrs. Addams gave us mattresses to sleep on, and once or twice a day when she wasn't cooking, Mama was permitted to use her kitchen to cook for us. Mrs. Addams also took our ration cards and did all of our shopping for us.

Because the basement was one large room, none of us had any privacy despite many attempts to set up the room differently. We had a makeshift kitchen area in one corner, with a table, and there was a mattress in each of the other three

corners. I was back to sharing a bed with Clara, as we had when we were little in Romania.

After a week, we had settled in comfortably, despite the dampness and mold. Each of us handled the situation differently. Father read his Torah and other religious books, and sometimes he would read passages aloud for us to discuss. All of us began to read a great deal, and we were lucky that Mr. Yaegar kept bringing us new library books. None of us liked being in hiding, but we were terrified by the alternative.

"Mama, I feel terrible," I said one day. "It's like I'm in prison here, but I've done nothing wrong."

"No one thinks you've done something wrong, Tekitsa," Father said.

"We don't have a choice, we have to hide," Mama said. We're hiding because . . ."

"I know, Mama, but I'm not staying inside here, hiding, all the time," I said. "I refuse. There's got to be a way for me to get out of here, sometimes."

"Tekitsa, you're not going to leave here," Father stated. "It's too dangerous: you could get killed."

"No, Father, Mama," I said. "Neither of you is going to keep me locked up in here. I don't care what you say, I'm going to go out sometimes. Besides, I would like to try to help other Jewish people who are trying to hide or escape from the Gestapo."

"They'll catch you, arrest you!" Mama said.

"Mr. Yaegar has already told me he will help me join the White Brigade," I said. Clara and Ilie listened, afraid.

"The White Brigade?" Father asked. "I knew that Hashomer group was a bad influence! Where else could you have heard about such things?"

"Mr. Yaegar is trying to get me a copy of Georgette's passport and other papers, and I'll have my picture put on them. You know, his daughter and I are about the same age."

"I wish I could do that, also," Ilie said. "I want to be free."

"I have resolved to live my life in a good way, not like a prisoner in here forever," I said. "I'm seventeen years old, and I can take care of myself."

"I suppose one of us will have to go out at times, to get food stamps for us," Mama said. "If Freide can establish a good disguise, if she will be safe, I suppose we should let her do this."

"Mama, no!" Father said. "Freide shouldn't go out, and I won't let her. She is just a young girl and can't defend herself against those horrible Gestapo soldiers. She'll get hurt. And besides, Mr. Yaegar or Mr. Addams, they can get us the things we need, and they won't be in danger the way we would be."

"I don't care what you say, Father. I insist on doing this. My hopes and dreams for freedom to come and the Germans to be ousted, these dreams are just not enough for me. I must help others."

"Do you believe you will be safe?" Mama asked.

"You'll see, Mama. I am going to have my hair dyed blonde, and no one will know me, even if they knew me before."

"Blondlockig"

A week later, when Mr. Yaegar arrived one day, I was waiting for him outside the Addams' house. It was quiet on the street and I was glad that for a change, I hadn't seen a German soldier on patrol. Mr. Yaegar walked right past me and was about to open the door when I called out.

"Mr. Yaegar, come here!"

"Freide?" He whispered. "Ah, very good! I almost didn't recognize you, but I know your exquisite voice. Come inside, I've got some important papers for you."

Inside, Clara was reading aloud from Emile Zola. When we came in, she put the book aside.

"Welcome, Mr. Yaegar," Father said.

"Mama, did you finish the list of books everyone wants? I'm going to go out in a little while, after Mr. Yaegar shows me my new papers."

"I want you to stay home," Mama said.

"Mama, we've discussed this already. I am going to join the Resistance and Mr. Yaegar said he can introduce me to someone."

"You know, Father is right. You don't need to go. Mr. Yaegar and Mr. Addams have always brought us whatever we need," Mama said.

Mr. Yaegar shook his head. "Mrs. Heller, I don't want to butt in, and I don't want to put you, your family, or Freide in danger. But unfortunately, I will not be able to run errands for you much longer."

"Why not, Mr. Yaegar?" Clara asked.

"I've thought about it, and with the way everyone is being watched, I just can't come here too much anymore," Mr. Yaegar said. "It might make people suspicious or I might get followed. I don't want to put all of you in danger. I'm sure you understand. But, if you ever need anything, I'll be glad to help you if there's some way I can do so."

"Mama, we are almost out of food stamps," Ilie said. "Freide, can you bring me any textbooks? Maybe you have something about engineering for me, Mr. Yaegar? I want to study and keep my mind busy."

"I'd like another Emile Zola book," Clara said. "Here's a list."

"Mr. Yaegar, I can't thank you enough for what you've done for my family," Mama said. "You're a hero!"

"Yes," Father added. "You already know how grateful I feel. God has blessed us with your friendship, and we thank him."

"I've been glad to assist you," Mr. Yaegar said. "Are you ready, Freide?"

"Yes. Now Mama, Father, don't worry. I'll be back very soon."

As we left, I overheard my family talking.

"Heshey is gone," Father said. "Are we going to lose Freide, too?"

"Father, don't say Heshey is gone. He'll be back to us, won't he, Mama?" Clara asked.

"Yes, Clara, he'll be back," Mama whispered. "They promised us he'll come back."

On the Streets

The first thing I did after Mr. Yaegar helped me get papers as Georgette Yaegar, was visit the Appels. I walked slowly to their house, feeling deliciously excited by my newly acquired freedom. They were such close friends, I felt comfortable entering their house without knocking. Leon was my first boyfriend, and his father and mine were business partners.

"Freide! Come inside, quickly," Mrs. Appel said.

"I'm surprised you recognized me," I said. Leah, a red-haired ten-year-old, rushed up to me to give me a hug.

"I almost didn't," she said.

"I wish I could stay and visit, but I don't feel comfortable doing that, the way things are. I came to bring you the postcard Leon sent. We got one from Heshey, too."

"Freide, you dyed your hair yellow! It looks pretty," Leah said.

"Are your parents well?" Mr. Appel asked.

"Yes, we are all fine, but we are hiding now. Aren't you afraid to stay here? Father worries that the Germans will come after us."

"Leon says he was only allowed to write one postcard. Humph!" Mrs. Appel said, handing the card to her husband.

"Please keep the postcard, Mrs. Appel. Who knows when we will hear from the boys again. I must leave now."

"Tell your father that we still have a few of your things; I also have a little soda money left, if that helps at all," Mr. Appel said.

"Don't stay out too close to curfew, and be careful," Mrs. Appel said. "Give our very best regards to your family."

"Good-bye," I said.

I next stopped to visit my voice teacher, Liza. I hadn't seen a piano in weeks and I hoped I could sing, even one song. My timing was lucky, as she was home and between students, and her husband was out, as well. Besides singing a few short songs, she offered to store some of our furniture in her house, and I was relieved to know my precious piano would be in her hands. We arranged for her to pick up any remaining furniture and my piano, from our house on Leewerik Straat. We couldn't have known at the time, but our house there would be uninhabitable by the end of the war.

It felt so good to be walking around Antwerp, no longer hidden inside, and yet I wanted to see my family. I picked up a newspaper and a few other things that

I could, which wasn't much, and rushed to them. It was late afternoon anyway, so I didn't want to risk being out during curfew

"Tekitsa, even though I am not happy about you going out of here, I'm glad you brought me the newspaper," Father said. "You are putting yourself, and possibly us too, in danger, but we are all in God's hands, and He watches over us."

"Mama, I met Liza for a little while, and she agreed to take my piano and whatever good furniture she finds at Leewerik Straat."

"Did you see Mr. Von Aden? That could have been dangerous," Mama said, shaking her head disapprovingly.

"Ah, here is an article about the collaborators. Listen to this: 'Mr. Jan Von Aden, prestigious entertainer, declares his loyalty and swears his everlasting devotion to Germany. Von Aden has sung in numerous, etc., etc. Von Aden ardently believes in the German cause, saying "Belgians are really part of the German Aryan superior race. All Belgians should vow to follow Hitler.' This is exactly why you mustn't go to his house, Tekitsa."

Mama lit a cigarette, and Father continued to read the paper.

"Children," Father said, "I want you to remember that our only allegiance is owed to Adonai, our God, Baruch Hashem. We should never lose faith in Him."

"I understand about God watching over us, Father," I said, "but I want to help others. That is part of our heritage, to do charitable acts. Won't God watch over and protect me, if I'm doing good deeds?"

Father smiled sadly. "Things aren't always so simple. You could get us all killed," Father said. "The German soldiers could follow you to us."

"I know, and I will always watch to see if I'm followed," I said. "I just have to do something to help. I'm not willing to depend on others to always protect us. I'm not sure . . ." I was interrupted by Hannah's loud crying as she awoke from a

nap. I took her from her crib and sang Shubert lullabies, softly. She was so hungry, and I had nothing to give her! She quieted down to a soft whimper, and I continued to walk, pace, and hum to her.

"Sometimes I wish I were little enough to cry for food," Clara said. "I bet she's starving, but I am, too. Mama, are you cooking more potatoes, again?"

"Mama is amazing, no?" Ilie said. "She has so many ways to prepare and disguise cabbage. We've had it Hungarian style, Romanian, Belgian, Palestinian, so what about tonight?"

"Don't forget those cabbage dumplings, and the ways she stuffed it with mushrooms, pickles, potatoes," I added.

"Yes, more potatoes!" Ilie said. "Mama, you are a genius for cooking. I believe you are part of the superior race of chefs!"

"How can you joke around about that?" Clara asked.

"We're going to have to do something about her," Mama said.

"Who, me?" Clara asked.

"Maybe the convent orphanage will take little Hannah," I said, planting a tiny kiss on the little girl's forehead. "It's just too much for you, Mama. Perhaps she'll be happier there, anyway."

"I don't like to see her go," Mama said, "to think of her in an orphanage. I wish we had enough food to keep her; I'd like to watch her, for her parents."

"You think there will be more food at the orphanage?" Clara asked. "I doubt that!"

"It will be easier for Mama and all of us. Hannah is too young to understand why it is dangerous if she cries. She tries, and I'm sure, like the rest of us, she is getting used to being hungry, but I think the nuns can care for her better."

"Will you see about it, then?" Mama asked. "Even though I hate to . . ." She stopped, and except for Hannah's whimpers, we were silent, hearing German troops marching down the street. I grabbed some food we'd saved and handed it to Hannah, who immediately stopped crying to eat. As the sound of marching faded away, I put Hannah down and sat beside her on a mattress. I wanted to write in my diary.

Chapter 6

The Rumbling

I hear the rumbling, rumbling
of the train, yet never board it
Once, one time it stops, and we rescue them
Surprised, then startled and shocked
As more and more people blink into the sunlight
and disembark from the car
Not a passenger compartment, with seats and carpeting
A regular freight train, cavernous hole
Cattle car
"Run to the woods!" We exclaim.

I hear the rumbling, rumbling
yet don't see any train
walking with fifty or so refugees
men bedraggled with straggly beards
women holding their children
children, alone
deep in a forest
we're running, running
yet we only plod along
our eyes never still
as we watch for soldiers to come upon us

once, they found us
though half of us hid
we watched, our hearts rumbling
running
as they were forced to dig a pit
then were buried alive

I hear the rumbling, rumbling
And they force me aboard the train
Sixty of us packed into a freight compartment
Just enough room for most of us to sit
and in the camp, my grandfather's kindness
"Here, take this," he said, pressing a scrap of stale bread into my hand

I awaken terrified, my breathing constricted

the dark pressing me down
and turn, throw my arm around my lover
whose sighs soothe me
yet cannot entice me to where sleep
might send me again
to the rumbling, rumbling.

Radio Under the Table

I was anxious to start working in the underground, but Mr. Yaegar said it might take some time to establish contact. Our lives continued at a slow pace as we stayed in our cramped quarters. It was easier for me, now that I could go outside. I knew I wasn't going to hide passively, but I wanted to help others as soon as I could. The waiting was hard for each of us.

We all passed the time by reading constantly, and we often discussed our books. Ilie studied engineering and also taught himself a few languages. His linguistic ability was phenomenal. I think he taught himself English in one month. By the time the war ended, Ilie could speak and write both English and French well enough to be understood, and he had essentially taught himself engineering.

I had to learn new skills to go outside, as it seemed like danger was all around me wherever I went. The second time I went out, I had a few errands to run. I saw Mrs. Addams as I was leaving.

"Where are you going, Freide?" She asked, and her voice sounded funny, the words slurred together so that it was hard to understand her. "Did you need to use our toilet? It's getting light outside, so you should stay downstairs."

"No, thank you, Mrs. Addams," I said, and suddenly noticed the half-empty bottle of whiskey next to her on the kitchen table. "I'm going to do some errands and will be back later."

I'd better talk to Mama about that, I thought as I walked out to the street. The streets seemed as busy as ever, with German soldiers posted at attention.

"Hey, blondlockig!" One young soldier called out. "You-who, hey girlie girl!"

I walked faster, heading towards a different corner, and another German whistled. I knew they liked my blonde hair, but they made me anxious, too.

"Hey, cutie! You—blondlockig!" Another soldier warbled. "Slow down so we can talk to you."

I hurried home, errands forgotten, but in the last blocks before our hiding place, I watched to see if I was being followed.

The rest of the family hardly went out, but of them all, Mama went out the most. Ilie wanted to see the sunlight, which I suppose he might have once or twice. For four long years, he had to content himself with going outside to see the stars.

Every few weeks, Mama wanted me to take her around shopping. We had green ration cards, which were worth more than money in some ways, because even with a lot of money you couldn't live on the black market food.

We ate more potatoes, cabbage, and onions than any other foods, but sometimes I could find an egg or two somewhere. Mama had to have her cigarettes, and finding and affording tobacco was difficult. It was also a big deal if I could get a quarter pound chunk of butter, which rarely happened. After we had been hiding for a few months, I began foraging in the city park for mushrooms, dandelion greens, and anything remotely edible. Mama found creative ways to cook up whatever I'd gathered.

We still had a radio, and every night, if things seemed safe enough, we'd pile on top of each other under the table, hoping to muffle the noise of the radio by staying close together and keeping the volume as low as possible. We listened to

BBC and other European stations. We longed for news about the Allied war efforts, defeats and successes. During the day, we often wanted to listen to the radio, but it was too dangerous, so we would hold whispered conversations and arguments about what we had heard the night before.

The power of the news was unbelievable. If we heard, for example, that the British had a defeat, or other such bad news, we were devastated. The next day we felt like we didn't want to get out of bed, and we hated to talk about it; sometimes if one of us tried to cheer up the rest, we'd argue about what we'd heard. The next evening, however, we were under the table as early as possible, hoping things had changed for the better.

Risks

I remember many different experiences I had when I left our hiding place. Always compelled by music, if I heard someone playing when I was on errands, I would seek out the music and linger. Once I recall standing outside a house, listening to someone play classical piano music. It is a vivid image in my mind, the sunlight playing on the cobblestone street, people going in and going out of houses, and the music shimmering around me.

At one point, I saw a German soldier stride past, and I found a way to look busy until he was gone. It wasn't that I didn't care about the risks; when I heard good music, I was compelled, as if I had a hunger inside me only song could gratify.

Music was one thing, but several times on the streets I saw an informer named Lauterbeaum. He was a Jewish man, one of the few who continued to wear his Jewish star. I overheard him in discussions with Gestapo soldiers on several occasions, and it infuriated me.

"Here is where three more Jewish families live," Lauterbeaum said to the soldiers. He pointed. "Also, not far down the next block, I can take you to another house where there is a Jewish family. It is house number seventeen, I believe. You will not find them in there unless you go inside the hall closet, where there is a hidden door. Another Jewish family is living openly in the house next door to them. Would you like me to take you there now?"

"You bastard," I screamed without thinking. At this point, I had a bicycle, so I jumped on and raced off. The men moved as if to follow me, but then they just stared at me, startled. I was just so angry at this Jewish man! It was a stupid thing I did, I know.

I felt the dangers around me, yet because I was seventeen, I still didn't really believe anyone would hurt me. In addition to stopping in the middle of the street to listen to music, I went for voice lessons with Liza when I could. Also, once or twice I bought tickets for and attended a classical music concert. One time, the only tickets left for that day's concert were for seats on stage, next to the wings. These tickets were a little cheaper, too, so I decided to buy one.

I had to sit on the stage with about ten other people, where I was right next to the orchestra and in view of a good portion of the audience. So excited to attend, I sat like in a trance, watching the orchestra tune up. The music was an incredible reprieve, but suddenly, the loud bomb sirens began, and everyone rushed out of the building into the bomb shelters. I saw several German soldiers watching me, and ignoring the sirens directing us to the shelters, I hurried breathlessly home.

Kroll, Blanche, Oste, and Arthur

The day finally came when Mr. Yaegar would introduce me to someone from the White Brigade. He took me to a coffee shop, and soon after we arrived, a good-looking blond man in his early twenties approached us. Kroll was a Christian man who wanted, like me, to help Belgian people survive the Germans. As soon as he had introduced us, Mr. Yaegar had to leave. Kroll took my arm.

"Let's walk a little," he said, "because then we can talk and not have to worry about anyone listening." We walked into the crowded street.

"Freide, we are pleased that you volunteered to join the White Brigade, as we need people. There are many dangers, however. Are you sure you want to do it?"

"I'm not afraid," I said.

"You should be," Kroll said. "You are Jewish. The Black Shirts are picking up all the Jewish people. It is even worse than that."

"You call the Gestapo the "Black Shirts?"

"We have a little code, in our White Brigade. A code makes things a bit safer."

"Well, tell me how I can help the White Brigade."

"I am taking you to meet two more people, first. Then I will have a job for you to do in a day or two." We continued walking until we came to a small, boarded-up, abandoned building. It looked like a box, its windows boarded up with scraps of wood and other materials. Graffiti was scrawled all over, and it looked ready for demolition. Kroll took me inside, and while it was extremely filthy looking on the outside, inside was even worse because of the smell and the scattered heaps of dirty discarded clothing. There was graffiti on the walls inside which seemed like messages, in many handwritings and a variety of languages.

"What a mess!" I said. "If my Mama saw this, she'd fuss."

"It's the devil's house, for sure."

"Why? Who lives here?"

"No one, at least, not for long," Kroll said. "But as you see, many people have passed through here. I brought you here to meet Blanche and Oste, but as soon as they arrive, we can leave."

"So this is a temporary hiding place? It looks like many have come through here. It is bad news, very bad," I said, having read some of the messages. There were references to horrors I can't even remember.

"I brought you to the devil's house because I have hidden a bicycle here for you. Also, you need to know where this is, because sometimes I will need you to come here, to meet others and help them."

"I think I am starting to get the idea," I said. "Don't worry, I'll catch on quickly."

"I just don't want you to be in danger," Kroll said. "This is a horrible time to be a teenager, and an even worse time to be any age of Jewish."

"Kroll, come outside—we'll meet you by the corner," a woman's voice called out.

Blanche and Oste, who were in their mid or late twenties, were clearly very much in love. Oste, who was a strong, broad shouldered gentlemanly Belgian, wore the uniform of army major. Looking like a blonde-haired porcelain doll, Blanche's delicate features were emphasized by careful make-up. She always dressed in stylish, perfectly matched clothes, which included a fancy hat and purse.

The street was busy which made it safe to walk and talk.

"I am glad to meet you," Blanche said. "This is my fiancé, Oste."

"Why have you joined the White Brigade," I asked. "Kroll says this work is very dangerous."

"My father is Jewish, but I was raised Catholic," Blanche said. "Since my father never registered as Jewish, I'm safe for now."

"Being a soldier, I'm not in any danger," Oste said. "Though many Belgians have joined the French and British armies, those of us that remain here are considered German allies."

"Listen carefully, my little sister Freide," Kroll said. "We are all soldiers, you included. Belgian soldiers who are mad about having another country take over and occupy our country. We don't want these Germans here."

"We also think it's wrong what they have done to many innocent Belgian citizens," Blanche said. "We're fighting back, in the only way we can."

"Freide, I know you have many questions," Kroll said, as I was about to speak, "but don't ask too many questions. The less you know, and the fewer names you know, the safer you are, and the safer we all are. We need to work together, silently and with great caution."

"You are not the only Jewish person in the White Brigade," Oste said. There is also a man named Sterngold, a very brave man whose wife and mother were taken away one day while he was out of his house finding ration cards for the ten people who were hiding in the devil's house at that time. When Mr. Sterngold returned to his home, his family was gone, almost without a trace."

"Heshey, my older brother, left us. He was called up to work a few months before they rounded up most of our neighbors. So many are gone, many of my friends are gone."

"Blanche is going to help you buy a new hat," Oste said. "It was a pleasure to meet you." Kroll bowed his head slightly and smiled at me, then he and Oste walked off in opposite directions.

Together, Blanche and I began to window-shop. As we walked from window to window, we pretended to be considering whether to go inside. We were not talking about clothes at all, however, and I soon figured out that neither of us was going to buy a hat.

"I think we have talked enough today," Blanche said. "Maybe even too much, really. It was also a hazard that all four of us met together. We will not do that again."

"But how will I know," I said, and didn't need to finish.

"One of us will meet you each day or two, to tell you what we need you to do. We will look for you in the bomb shelter three blocks from your home, for now, but we will change the meeting location every few days."

Blanche explained that I should be on guard at all times.

"When you return from a mission," Blanche said, "take the longest route home and always stop in front of two or three shops to see whether you are being followed. You can watch in the shop windows, like we are doing now. If you ever suspect that you have been followed, don't return to your hiding place. Instead, keep walking or riding your bike until you lose the shadow."

She told me that we had been together long enough for one day, and that we would meet again soon. After wishing me good luck and telling me to be careful, she casually strolled away.

In the shop window, I saw my reflection and watched hers moving away. Everything around me seemed normal, so I moved on to another shop, then another, practicing what I'd just learned. After another block, I left the shopping

district. A few minutes later, I reached a fancy neighborhood, and I went through the gate to a large, elegant mansion surrounded by landscaped, expansive gardens. Arthur was sitting in the garden, reading, yet suddenly he saw me and came to greet me.

"Hello," I said, suddenly feeling shy. I noticed the Star of David sewn on his shirt.

"Hello," he said, smiling, and I realized he didn't recognize me. He looked pretty much the same, the sunlight playing on his light brown hair and high forehead.

"What are you reading?" I asked.

"Who are you," he asked. "I mean, I'm glad you came to visit."

"You truly don't recognize me, Arthur?"

"I don't, I'm sorry. I know I'd remember you if I had met you before."

"You have met me!" I said, laughing a little. "I'm Freide Heller, but I dyed my hair blonde. The rest of me is about the same."

"Freide! Yes, I remember you! We were in the same school. Please come sit in our garden with me, and I'll tell you about my book."

"I'm surprised that you and your family are still here," I said. Don't you think you should leave, or at least, hide?"

"Leave or hide? Why would we need to . . ."

"Remember Leon Appel, Oscar Brenner, my older brother Heshey? Heshey is just a year older than you, as you are what, two years older than me? I'm afraid they may never come back, and the Gestapo keeps taking away more Jewish people. We got only one postcard from Heshey . . ."

"Our family is not worried," Arthur said. "The Germans are not going to do anything to us. We're Belgian Jews! We've lived here for three generations."

"My family, we are Romanian, but it doesn't matter what country you are from. The way things are right now, if you are Jewish—watch out!

"You don't really believe that, do you? Is that why you came by to visit, to lecture me?"

"No, I was going over to the offices of the Yudenraden," I said. "I wondered if they have received any word from all our young men, from my brother."

"There has been nothing."

"I see."

"Would you like a cup of coffee, some cake?" Arthur asked. I held back my urge to say yes, as I hadn't had coffee or cake in who knows how long. It was getting to be late afternoon, however, and I was worried about the curfew.

"No, I must leave now."

"I'd like to see you again, soon," Arthur said. "May I?"

"Sure!" I said. "That would be fine, I mean, but I won't come here."

"If you think it's too dangerous for you here, we can meet somewhere else. It's silly, though, for you to be afraid."

"I suppose it would be okay to meet here again one more time. I'll come by next week."

"I'm so glad," Arthur said. "I'll look forward to spending more time with you then."

"Until then," I said.

The smell of meat cooking was a welcome aroma when I walked into our hiding place. The table had just been set.

"Tekitsa, Mama has cooked some rabbit stew," Father said. "She knows I won't eat that tref meat, so that means more for you children."

"I'll eat it, and the children will too, even if it's not kosher," Mama said. They are still growing, and they hardly eat any meat. If you don't want it, don't eat it."

"Oh—there you are, stupid," Clara said.

"Clara, don't call your sister names," Mama said.

"Well, look at her, just wandering in so close to curfew, like we are on a holiday, not stuck in this damp hole. Stupid! It will be her fault if the Gestapo follows her here, finds us, and kills us."

"Today I finally met people from the Resistance," I said. "But I am only going to tell you a very little about them. We are supposed to keep everything secret, as it is safer that way for everyone."

"It would be safer if you just stayed home," Father said.

"Also, you'll never guess who I visited—Arthur Schlesinger."

"That's a good family," Father said. "Mr. Schlesinger is the best diamond man in town."

"And the wealthiest, too," Mama said. "Where did you see him?"

"His family still lives in the same home. I stopped by and he invited me inside the gardens."

"That can't be very safe, going into his house like that," Mama said. "Aren't they afraid? Oy, I am just about out of tobacco, so could you please buy me some more? I have hardly enough for one more cigarette."

"Yes, Mama."

"And Freide, don't go to back to Arthur's house," Mama added. "I have enough to worry about, with Mrs. Addams' drinking, and you out on the streets helping people. If you want to see Arthur, meet him somewhere else."

Mrs. Ganz

At times like these, when so much seemed so bad, Ilie would often rescue us. He would conceal himself somehow, despite the lack of privacy in our one-room hiding place, and dress up in Mama's, Clara's and my clothes. He'd borrow a pair of very, very high-heeled shoes. Then, he'd paint his face with gaudy make-up colors on eyes, cheeks and lips. Usually, his lips were the reddest red you could imagine.

"Thank you for inviting me for dinner, Madam Heller," Ilie would say, jumping out from under a blanket, speaking in a high, squeaky falsetto, and batting his newly attached eyelashes. "I'm sorry, Mr. Ganz couldn't come."

We all would laugh. Mrs. Ganz was a neighbor we really didn't like!

"It's so nice to see you, Mrs. Ganz," Father might say. "Don't you look lovely?"

"But where are your lovely diamonds?"

"My diamonds? Oh," Ilie twittered, pretending to curtsey or something. At this point, an eyelash would be about to fall off, or he'd look in the mirror and check his lipstick.

"And your eye make-up," Mama would tease. "It doesn't seem like you are wearing enough tonight, Mrs. Ganz."

"Don't make fun of Mrs. Ganz," I said. "She tries so hard, but she's just too fat."

"Would you mind, Rosa, if I dance one dance with Mrs. Ganz?" Father always said. "She just looks so lovely tonight."

Everyone laughed as Father swung Ilie around in a goofy, waltzing dance.

Chapter 7

Antwerp, 1973

At twelve I was proud to begin studying for my Bat Mitzvah, scheduled for September 21, 1973. For my birthday in July, my parents and I visited Israel, then Belgium and England.

One of the places we visited was Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial. Looking at the many exhibits and photographs was painful for Mom and for me, and we walked through in silence, holding hands. You couldn't hide from the piercing eyes of gaunt children, concentration camp prisoners. There was a computer you could use to look up family who had disappeared during the war, so I looked up Uncle Heshey. He was listed as Herz Heller, and the dates of his deportation to, arrival and death at Auschwicz were plainly listed.

After Israel, we flew to Belgium, as Mom wanted to visit Antwerp. She had not returned since the war. To many Americans, a city like Antwerp will probably seem very old. At least, to me, used to the bigness and newness of New York City, it seemed dark and small, the buildings close, and the cobblestone streets, narrow. Mom was excited about our reservations for a particular hotel, a very fancy one that she had always wanted to stay at when she was a child.

The hotel seemed ancient, and though the front lobby had a quaint appeal, the overall impression was one of shabbiness. As soon as we checked into our room, my parents, seeing I was tired, suggested I take a nap. They told me they were going to look for Shulum's grave.

I lay down on a lumpy, uncomfortable mattress and slept awhile. After my nap, I found my parents still had not returned. I was scared. When they returned,

they found me crying with worry. Mom apologized when she realized the condition of the room and the poor quality of the beds, and we immediately made reservations for a different hotel, where we moved the very next morning.

Together, Mom and I walked around Antwerp, and we found Stadion Straat, her family's last hiding place. Mom talked about looking for Kroll. We couldn't go inside the house they had hid in, but across the block there still lived a hairdresser who had dyed Mom's hair. I recall how excited the woman was, although at first she didn't recognize Mom because Mom was no longer a blonde.

Excited about showing me around Antwerp, Mom wanted me to try "the best ice-cream and milk in the world," and I hated them both. Her disappointment was eased by my discovery of marzipan, an almond paste candy, which I immediately loved.

How relieved I was to leave for London, a week later; I just couldn't grasp what visiting Antwerp meant for Mom. For me, this place was full of darkness.

Hiding and Living

Despite my worries that our next hiding place would be the devil's house, Kroll directly moved us to the attic of Mrs. Brussels' apartment. This was much more pleasant than the Addams' basement, as it was neat and had two rooms. Mama and Father used the larger room as their bedroom and as our kitchen area, and Ilie, Clara and I shared a room to sleep in. We still had no bathroom facilities, but most of the time we could go downstairs to Mrs. Brussels' apartment. Occasionally we would use a little chamber-pot.

We had very little furniture. We managed with what we had had at the Addams, and although Mrs. Brussels let Mama use her kitchen, we also owned a

little hot plate. The attic was clean and I remember how much we enjoyed the way sunlight burst through the lacy curtains.

Ilie was continuing his study of engineering. Often he would design drawings of buildings he thought he might build. Also, when he had enough colors to use, he'd copy a famous artwork from memory or from an art book we'd borrowed from the library. Ilie kept asking me for more books, he was continually in need of paper and other supplies, which I would forage for in dumpsters by the school and anywhere else I could think of. I would collect small fragments of crayons, a drawing pad with pages still blank on the backs; Ilie was thrilled with whatever I scrounged. Once, I remember finding a box of almost new crayons.

Ilie copied, with an amazing closeness, a landscape painting by a famous artist, which artist I can't remember. Mama loved that little sketch, which she had framed, and it hung in her apartment until she died.

The best thing, for me, in this new hiding place, was the piano downstairs. Soon after we moved in, Mama told me that Mrs. Brussels was hoping to have me play her piano, as her daughters were grown and no one used it anymore. I wasn't allowed to sing, as that could attract dangerous attention, but playing was better than nothing.

Naiveté

Arthur was soon my boyfriend, and I met him a once or twice a week. He always fed me sweets, chocolates or little pastries, and for a short hour, in my mind I escaped from the occupation. We had many disagreements, however, as Arthur continued his life much the same as before the war, unaware of how few Jews

remained in Antwerp, unafraid of the German "friends" his father now had. He and his family continued to wear their sewn-on Jewish stars.

Arthur talked quite a bit about his plans for the future. Although his father wanted him to eventually control the family diamond business, he dreamed of being a writer.

Some days, when we met, Arthur would give me a rose and act out the sweetest courtship, kneeling before me and kissing me passionately. As soon as he left, I'd pick a bag of mushrooms, dandelions, or anything else I had seen, to add to Mama's provisions for dinner.

I visited Mr. Yaegar at school one day, and he wished me to sing again at the mass. He assured me I could do it wearing the choir robe. Up in the choir loft, he assured me I'd remain unseen by the congregation. It seemed a small risk, and meant I could sing again, so I began to I'd sneak into the Cathedral of Our Lady for the early mass on Sunday, maybe once a month.

I rode by Liza's home as often as I could, but didn't dare to go inside when I saw Jan Van Aden's car in the driveway. About once a month, it seemed safe to go inside and sing one short song.

Caught by Curfew

We didn't have a curfew all the time, but every so often something would happen. I remember one time a dead soldier was discovered, and the Germans blamed the Resistance for this. There was also a lot of sabotage by the Belgian people. The whole Belgian population was then put on curfew for a few days. At other times, there was often a curfew for the whole city of Antwerp.

My resistance work continued. I continued to deliver ration cards to people, sometimes meeting a stranger at a pre-arranged spot on the street. I'd try to be the least obvious, saying "Here. There's something for you," then I'd just leave.

One afternoon, Kroll met me at the devil's house. There were two men with him, whose names I don't recall. Anxious, they waited in that dismal demolition-ready building, looking as if neither of them had slept well in weeks. In dusty, disheveled clothes, the men were both extremely thin.

Kroll told me to take them to a street on the outskirts of town, I think it was Stuyvenvergh Straat. Although I knew how to get there, we got lost several times. The two men were so nervous they held tightly onto me, one on each side of me. We must have been quite a comical sight, these two tall, mature men clinging to me, as I was a slight, skinny teenager just over five feet tall.

They held me so tightly I was bruised black and blue for days. When we walked through some quiet streets, one of them told me what had happened to them.

"We were together on a train going to Auschwicz," the man said. "The Germans told us it was a good vacation place for Jews, and that we would like it, but when they crammed us aboard that train, so many of us that few could sit, I knew it couldn't be true that we were going somewhere nice."

He told me that many of the people on the train looked sickly or hungry.

"I saw a thread of sunlight coming in through the door, and with a small stick, with our fingernails, we worked on that hole for about a day, until we made a hole large enough for me to go through. Then we jumped out when the train went traveling through a forest."

He paused in his story when we passed a German soldier on duty. Soon, we again realized we were circling around, but we were almost in the right place. I asked the man to finish his story.

"It took us seven days to walk here to Antwerp, where I knew we could find friends. We were free in the forest, but both of us were looking over our shoulders, terrified that we might be hunted down or lost."

We finally reached the house where the two men would be hiding, with curfew only thirty minutes away. Without my bicycle, I wouldn't be able to get home in time.

I walked for blocks until I found a boarded-up, abandoned building. I looked in a few windows, most of which had no glass, and since it looked empty, I climbed in somehow and went up to the second floor. It was drafty throughout, and the very little furniture around was in broken pieces. I found a chair that was usable and sat beside a window which had a tiny view of the street below.

It had already grown completely dark outside. As the streetlights came up, I tried to remember whether I had eaten lunch. I was scared, cold, and hungry. My hunger lessened when I saw Germans tramp past below the window, and saw others coming in and going out of what looked like some sort of headquarters.

Most of the night, I sat and watched the street, trying to stay awake, and once in a while I walked cautiously around the dark room. I heard the Germans all night long, which kept me edgy, on guard. When the morning light came up in the sky, I knew that curfew would soon be over.

The sun warmed my back, infusing me with fresh energy as I started off towards our secret home.

Darkness

We celebrated Chanukah, 1942, without Heshey. The candles flickering in the menorah cast shadows, but the shadows weren't as dark as the ones in our minds. When would we see him again? When would we be able to stop hiding and go home again?

It was winter, cold and dark, and we were hungrier than ever. Clara hardly seemed to stop complaining how hungry she was; we all just looked at her and kept our mouths shut. She wasn't the only one tired of the watered down milk or skimpy buttermilk Mama made with the one or two bottles we managed to buy with rations each week. Before now, we had been able to buy chicken once or twice a month from the black market. Until now, broth and soups were comforting and we could distract each other from the fact that it was more water than soup. The rare piece of fish we ate was a fine treat.

There were no fresh greens in the city park during the cold months, but I still sometimes found a mushroom or two under the snow. I grabbed it greedily for Mama, who knew which ones were harmless to eat. Some days, however, I saw other people starving, and I didn't feel as hungry. I felt concerned.

Father couldn't stand how we were living. How was this to raise a family?

"I'm going to see Mr. De Groat," he said one dark December morning at breakfast. "He is holding what's left of our money, the little we still have."

"Father, why don't you let me go see him," I asked. "I am going out, anyway. Wouldn't it be safer?"

"I think your father needs to go himself," Mama said. "He will be careful, I'm sure, as he has been out before and knows how to be safe."

"It's not up to me, Rosa," Father said. "God watches over us and will keep me safe. I will be home for dinner, God willing, Baruch Hashem."

I didn't think much about God in those days. I had too many other things to think about, such as having enough food. We left together, and Father hurried off.

Father had only been out three or four times in the six months since we'd been in hiding. He was a well-known man in Antwerp, and didn't want to be seen. Father had given many of our valuables to his friend Mr. De Groat, who ran a very fancy grocery store. I don't know what money and jewels and things Father had asked him to keep for us.

I had to deliver some ration cards to the foster parents of Chaya, who knew her only as Elizabeth. When I knocked on the door, her foster mother answered and quickly pulled me inside.

"Come in quickly," she said. "I wasn't sure it was you."

"Here are the ration cards for the month," I said, then lifted Chaya up for a big hug. She seemed well nourished and well taken care of, in a pretty dress with bows in her hair.

"Freide, I have missed you," Chaya said. "Can you stay and play checkers? I've been practicing so I can beat you this time!"

"Go back into the playroom," Chaya's foster mother said. "Freide will come play with you in a few minutes, Elizabeth."

As always, it jarred on my ear to hear Chaya's new gentile name. Though I had become Georgette Yaegar on paper, people rarely called me that. Would things ever return to normal, when Jews could walk the streets freely again and call one another by their real names?

"There is a problem," the foster mother said. "My husband and I feel that it is too dangerous for you to come here, so we would like to meet you somewhere else each month."

"I respect that," I said, "and I can understand your worries. I will miss Elizabeth, but this will all be over soon, I hope."

She thanked me and we arranged a meeting place.

"That sounds fine," I said. I went into the next room to give Chaya a hug and a kiss, then quickly left. I wanted to see Liza. Jan's car wasn't there, but Liza was short with me because she had a student coming.

"Please don't come here so often," Liza said. "It is too dangerous. I don't trust my husband; I am afraid he will hurt you if he finds you here, and I'm not sure how much I can protect you against him."

Liza's warning was too late, in a way, for although I left almost as soon as I arrived, as I walked out the door Jan's Mercedes pulled up to the curb. I walked quickly and turned my head, but I'm sure he saw me. I jumped on my bicycle and pedaled away trembling.

I also had promised Arthur I would meet him in the park. He told me his father was predicting that the war would end in a month or two. I wasn't sure why his father felt this way, but my sources in the White Brigade felt the war was going to continue longer than that. I saw many mushrooms, which I pointed out to Arthur, and he and I had a treasure hunt for mushrooms until he grabbed me by the waist and tried to cover me with kisses.

Somehow I eventually freed myself from Arthur's embraces, and returned to Mrs. Brussels. Mama was pleased with all the mushrooms, but we were concerned that Father had not yet returned, especially when night came upon us. The next day, I stayed in, reading and discussing Zola's *Germinal*. Clara, Ilie and I had each

read it, and we disagreed about certain issues. Did we believe in communism, in unions? We talked all morning about this.

Although I didn't discuss this with Clara and Ilie, I, for one, worried that if the Belgian Jewish people had to keep hiding, it would be a lot like the miners in this fine novel who get caught inside when the mine collapsed. Many miners died from this experience. Yes, at the end Étienne survived his ordeal, yet he seemed a shell of a man afterwards. Is this what our Jewish survivors would be like? I hoped not.

It was my hope that kept me going, I know, and each of us had this hope. Mama would remind us to hope, whenever she saw us saddened.

By late afternoon, Mama was pacing, and none of us could think of anything else but our missing father. It was unusual for Mama to forget to prepare dinner, so I reminded her of the mushrooms I'd picked.

"Mama, what are we going to do," Clara said. "Father has never been gone this long." Even Clara, who usually would be complaining about how hungry she felt, was distracted.

"I want to go look for him," I said, putting my silver star of David into my shoe, then putting on the shoes and tying the laces. "Father said he was going to see Mr. De Groat."

"Don't go to Mr. De Groat's," Mama said. "If Father is in trouble, it may be worse if you show up there. Perhaps you should try to find Mr. Sterngold, who might be able to help."

"Yes, Mama, that is a good plan. Don't worry. I'll find Father." As I left, I saw Mama take out things to prepare dinner, and Clara began to set the table.

It was odd luck that after I had walked a few blocks, I ran into Mr. Sterngold.

"I'm looking for my father," I said. "Have you seen him?"

"Come on, I want to take you home. I have to talk to your mother and family," Mr. Sterngold said, taking my arm.

I could sense that something was terribly wrong. As soon as we arrived at Mrs. Brussels' house, I showed Mr. Sterngold our attic.

"Rosa, sit down. Hello, Clara," he said. "I have something terrible to tell you."

Mama and the others sat around the kitchen table, but I stood next to her.

"Your husband—your father—is dead," Mr. Sterngold said. He told us that he thought the grocery man, Mr. De Groat, had told the Gestapo that Father was visiting his home. At this time, apparently, a number of Jews were rounded up and all killed together.

There was going to be a funeral the following day, which the small nucleus of Jews remaining had been permitted to prepare for. When Mama heard this, she went into shock and fainted. It was like she wasn't there anymore. We put her in bed, and she didn't want to eat or drink. She was out of her mind, almost like she was in a coma, and it took her two weeks to recuperate.

"What time is the funeral," I asked after we had put Mama to bed. "Will you have a minyan there?"

"It's going to be a mass grave," Mr. Sterngold said. "There's a whole bunch of Jews who are going to be put in the graves." He told us the Germans gave the bodies to the Yudenraden, without any excuses given as to the cause or reason for these deaths. In those days, all you had to say was that someone was collaborating against the Germans, and that person would be murdered.

I didn't understand how the Germans could have gassed my father, but that is what Mr. Sterngold told us. There was something like a portable gas chamber used on these Jews in Antwerp on December 26, 1942.

"I will go to the funeral," I said.

"No, Freide, you shouldn't go," Sterngold said. "No one should go near the Jewish cemetery tomorrow. It's too dangerous."

Although everyone tried to convince me not to go, I was unwavering. "If it's the last thing I do, I'm going to go to Father's funeral," I insisted.

The next morning, Kroll stopped by to see Mama and to try again to convince me to stay away from the funeral. I didn't care what was happening. I was going to go. It was for Father. Before I left, I put a on big black cloth band, which practically covered the whole part of my upper arm.

When the service began, the ten men who composed the minyan were the only Jewish people at the cemetery. There was also a whole bunch of Nazis watching, and there was an announcement made that there were fifty men in the large casket. I didn't see any bodies. I felt dazed, and went into a little chapel, where a brief Hebrew service was held, and Kaddish was said. After the service, we followed the casket to the graveyard, through two or three blocks of city streets.

One of the Nazis approached me.

"What are you doing here?" He asked.

"I'm the daughter of Meshulum Heller. I came to his funeral," I said.

"That's a stupid thing to do," he said. "Is anyone else from your family here?"

"No, you took everyone else!"

I kept walking. The soldiers talked and pointed at me, and they marched as though they were heading towards a feast. The casket was lowered, a final prayer was said, and the few onlookers left. I picked up a shovel and pushed some dirt into the grave. As I turned to leave, a Nazi approached me.

"You stupid Jew," he said, and savagely hit me between the shoulders with his weapon. I fell to the ground.

I don't know how long I lay there. Finally, everyone had left, and I picked myself up. It didn't even occur to me to go straight to our hiding place, however; I wandered around the city for about four hours, until I couldn't walk any further. When I returned to our attic, my back was covered with a layer of dried blood and dirt.

Kroll was waiting at the Brussels' house, and when he saw my wound, he immediately went for Blanche, who took me to the doctor. Although the doctor swabbed me with antiseptic and sewed sixteen stitches into my back, I was oblivious to the physical pain. Father was gone. Like Mama, I was very sick, but I healed. There wasn't any other choice. We survived and went on.

Chapter 8

Auschwicz Inheritance

Pulling my sweater on over my nightgown, I rush barefoot to the front door to answer the knocking, only to find no one is there. Without thinking, I step outside, down the three stairs and across the rough concrete path. The grass glows brightly as if it had just stopped raining; it glows even in the darkness, as if reflecting the moon. Abruptly I stop, seeing Heshi's arm. It stands straight up, resting on the elbow, perched at eye level on a branch of the oak tree in the middle of the yard. Severed near the joint of the arm, cold, ghostlike.

I jump slightly and awake, my heart thumping loudly. Why did I dream of Heshi's arm? He's safe, relatively so, on the kibbutz in Israel. Is he on a tour of duty right now? Maybe that's why I dreamt of mutilation. And don't ask me how I knew it was his arm. I just knew.

This was a dream I had in the late 1970's, yet I still remember it. I carry in my mind a photo album of dreams, and many are as startling. Heshi, his wife Caryn, and their two sons moved back to New York after twelve years of kibbutz life. When he returned from Israel, he told me that he had participated in some workshops for children of survivors.

"I've tried and tried to get Mom involved. I know it would be good for her to join a survivor's group," Heshi said.

"Why?"

"I can't say specifically what it will do for her, but I know what it did for me," Heshi said.

"It's been hard for me to change my attitude, but at least I now understand certain things better than I used to. For example, I've always hated birthdays, particularly mine. Caryn has gotten so annoyed with me when the boys' birthdays come around and I try to disappear."

"I talked to other children of survivors, and then I thought about what it was like growing up. Caryn was a wonderful listener. I remembered was my own birthdays. You know, you get all excited and all, and friends bring presents, and I always thought, maybe this year will be better, maybe this year they will be happier."

I was baffled. I had no idea what he was talking about. Then again, Heshi is seven years older than I. The only birthday party of his that I remember is his Bar Mitzvah party.

"Did you know that every year, when Mom and Bubby had lit the candles and were singing 'Happy Birthday,' that they'd always cry when they sang my name? How can a little kid possibly continue to love birthdays when the two most important people in his life cry so bitterly on his every birthday?"

Renewed Fear (January - May, 1943)

After Father's death, I changed. I was never again particularly confident or unafraid in the streets of Antwerp. I continued to go out every day, yet, everywhere I went, I looked over my shoulder, wary, and when in the past, I'd have just circled around for only ten or twenty minutes before returning to my family, now I often wandered for an hour or more, hesitating before I again set foot into the shelter of our hiding place.

One morning, a few days after Father's funeral, I walked out to bring food to someone a few blocks away. As I returned, a young German soldier seemed to be following me or flirting with me. I'm not sure what he wanted, but I was quite scared. He followed me for half an hour, during which time I went into stores and a grocery store, trying to lose him.

The young soldier never said anything, but every time I looked in a shop window or turned around, he was still following me. After close to an hour, I went into a little store that I knew had a bathroom close to a back exit. The German followed me inside, and seeing him, I bought a lemonade, left it on the counter, and pretended to go to use the bathroom. Instead, I ran out the back door. I walked for at least another hour, but didn't see him again.

Life became a day to day struggle against despair and depression. Mama convalesced from her shock, but she was never the same. She accepted that Father was gone, but continued to talk about plans for after the war, when Heshey would return. It was now up to Clara, Ilie and I to find our own hope and strength. It was also important to try to prevent Mama from slipping back into the gloomy stupor she experienced for so many weeks after Father died.

Ilie studied hard, using these years of hiding to develop linguistic, engineering, and drawing skills, but I remember him saying how he wished he could, for only for a few minutes, stand outside in the sunlight. He looked for ways to amuse and cheer us up, and I know I took advantage of him a little, as an older sister will, when I took over Father's job to regularly give him haircuts.

"These scissors aren't sharp enough," I'd say, as I cut zigzags through his curly black hair. His haircuts ended up looking so hilarious that Clara, Mama and I laughed and laughed.

"I'm going to kill you!" Ilie said when he saw himself in the mirror. He'd chase me around the room, tackle and then tickle me, and by the time he was ready for another haircut, he had somehow forgotten, or pretended to forget, what a mess I'd made before, so this scene was re-enacted a number of times.

I had studied some of the arias from Mozart's opera *Don Giovani*, and all of us had seen it, so every so often, Ilie and I would dress up and act out certain dramatic scenes. Sometimes we'd whisper-sing the songs; other times, we would do the silliest costume arrangements we could create using odds and ends. We enjoyed doing a pantomime version of scenes, and by the time we finished, all of us were laughing, particularly at Ilie's antics.

I recall seeing Ilie take a book or sketchpad and then seek small sunlit corners of the attic, like a cat will, to sit in. Spring came without his being able to enjoy the fresh wonder of newly emerging flowers; I picked flowers for our home whenever I could, but so much of Belgium had grown bleak under the occupation. Many gardens appeared to be neglected.

Sometime after the crocuses and early bulbs bloomed, I sat at Mrs. Brussels' piano and played for an hour in the afternoon, something I enjoyed doing every day or two. Suddenly the front door opened.

"Mother, are you home?" Francine called out as she walked inside. Her boyfriend, a Nazi soldier, followed her inside.

"Hello," I said. "You mother will be home soon. She went to the dentist."

"Who are you?"

"I'm Georgette Yaegar," I said. "I live next door, and your mother gave me permission to play the piano whenever I want to. I don't have a piano." I was hoping they wouldn't notice that I wasn't wearing any shoes.

"Uh-huh. When is my mother supposed to be home?"

"She probably will be home soon." I began to play another piece, and soon Mrs. Brussels came in.

She was startled to see me playing the piano with her daughter and the Nazi watching, but she quickly hid her confusion and invited us to have some tea with them. Since I couldn't leave her apartment barefoot, but I also couldn't return to the attic, I asked to be allowed to play some more. I still hoped they hadn't seen my feet.

I played until Mrs. Brussels found an excuse to leave with her company. The next day, Mrs. Brussels came up to our attic.

"I'm afraid there's a problem," Mrs. Brussels said. "When my daughter Francine and her boyfriend saw Freide playing here, they were suspicious. I don't think the Nazi figured it out, but my daughter asked me this morning, 'was that a Jewish girl?' I don't think you will be safe here anymore."

"We don't want to put you or your family in danger, either," I said. "We will move as soon as possible."

We immediately packed, and the next morning we moved into the devil's house. Mrs. Brussels kept some of our meager furniture for us, temporarily, because we knew we would eventually find something more permanent than the devil's house. Most of it we brought with us, however, as we didn't know how long it would be before we moved again.

Living in the dismal squalor of the devil's house mortified Mama, and this acted on her like a cold splash of water on a hot afternoon. No matter what she did, this house would never be clean or neat or comfortable. She was now even more determined to protect us and survive whatever we had to survive, until the war would end and we could be free.

The devil's house was large, like an old mansion, and to look at it, you'd never think anyone would be living inside, although it probably was a beautiful house at some point. The eight or ten people already living there didn't like it when we came, as they felt it was going to be too crowded. Everyone felt safe there, however, because it seemed very isolated, and there also weren't any owners to worry about.

The three dark rooms we used in the devil's house were on the middle floor of the three-story house, and throughout the house there was no water or electric. This meant that we used candles, even during the day, as there was little light let in by the boarded-up windows. This also meant that we each had to use a potty and take care of it. Thus, at 6 a.m. we would sneak out to dump our potties into a sewer drain two blocks away. There was a street pump we used to clean things, and we used it to fill up buckets of water each day.

Clara would beg me to clean out her potty for her, which I did once or twice, and Mama took care of Ilie's potty for him. Somehow, we also had to carry inside enough water for all of our needs. When I met Kroll a few days later, we walked a few blocks so that we could talk.

"I told Clara that you call it the devil's house, and now that's what even Mama is calling our hiding place now," I said. "I don't like to complain, but we are very uncomfortable there."

"I know that place is horrible," Kroll said. "I hope to move you very soon. Now, I have something . . ."

I interrupted him as we passed a bomb shelter, as I had heard a noise.

"Do you hear that? It sounds like someone is crying inside the bomb shelter," I said.

"Are you sure? It sounds to me like a cat."

"I'd like to see if there is someone inside who needs help." We went inside, where it was dark and cramped. A bench ran all along the wall, with room enough for about ten people. On the floor, a pitiful, dirty bundle of clothing covered what looked like a small child of about ten or eleven. At first, she didn't look human. More skeleton than flesh, her face looked like she had been crying for days. Rocking and whimpering, and covered with dust and dirt, she didn't notice us.

"You were right, Freide," Kroll said. "It's a child, perhaps a little girl."

"We have to help her," I said. "I want to bring her with me. Will you help?"

"Of course. Shall I carry her?"

"Little girl, what is your name? I am Freide."

"Oh, I just want to die," the child moaned, finally seeing us. "Go away, leave me alone. Let me die."

"We are going to take you and take care of you. Kroll will carry you if you can't walk." The child turned away from us, crying.

Kroll lifted the little girl and we returned to the devil's house.

"Are you a priest?" She asked Kroll as we walked.

"Not really," Kroll said, "but if you need me to be a priest, that is what I will be for you."

We washed the child as well as we could. She told us her name was Anneke, and that she was fifteen years old. She wanted to commit suicide, so we were very concerned about her. The first day, we took turns holding her and trying to feed her. All day long, she cried and whimpered.

"I want to die," Anneke said. "Where's my mother? Where's my father?"

Mama prepared some broth, and Clara offered some to Anneke. When Anneke ignored her and refused to eat it, Clara tried using a spoon to put some water in her mouth. Anneke spit it out.

"She's a goner," Mama said, even though she wanted very badly to save this child.

There were seven or more other people also hiding in this miserable hovel, and they all complained about Anneke's crying.

"She is going to get us killed, because a black shirt will walk by this abandoned building and hear her crying," one woman said.

"It's bad enough we have to live in this graffiti-covered hole," one man said. "I escaped off a train that was crowded full of moaning people. Shut that child up!"

Someone else protested, saying that we were risking everyone's lives. Within a few days, Anneke began to eat, and although she didn't stop crying, she grew quieter in her constant weeping. Kroll had also spoken with her, telling her that if she kept crying, no one would let her stay with them. She liked Kroll more than anyone else, and she listened.

Mr. Sterngold said he knew Anneke's father and knew where to find him, so he told me the address. When her father was called up by the Germans, he went into hiding with Anneke's twenty-year-old brother, leaving Anneke with her mother.

"Also, there is a young girl, in the care of an older man, and their hiding place is no longer safe," Mr. Sterngold said. "Bring them to where you are hiding, and tell them I hope I will have a new place for them within a week.

"I'll do my best," I said. I went to the small apartment where they were hiding, and found a small, worried-looking child and a fifty-year-old man whose name might have been Gideon.

"I'm from the White Brigade," I said, "and I've come to help you move, since this place isn't safe any more. Pack up only a small bag, so you won't look suspicious on the streets."

"Yes, I know about moving," Gideon said. "Leah and I have had to move a few times already."

"This is Leah? Where did you find her?"

"She had almost starved to death, in a house on Leewerik Straat."

When Gideon described the house, I knew this was Leah Appel, who had once been a gorgeous, vivacious redhead. Her thin, faded beauty still reminded me of her brother Leon, whom I had dated for about a year.

"Do you remember me?" I asked her, telling her my name.

"Sure," she said, perking up a little. "You lived next door, and Papa and your father worked together making soda. But then you left, and then the soldiers came and took Mama and Papa away. When will they come back?"

"Come, Leah, I have a nice surprise for you. I'm not sure when we'll see your parents, but let's go see Clara, and find out what my mother baked today."

I brought Leah and Gideon to the devil's house, explaining that they would stay there until a better location could be found. When Mama saw Leah, she immediately insisted the little girl stay with us. Gideon didn't want to let her, but Mama didn't give him a choice. When Mama dished out some potatoes, cabbage, and a thin onion broth, Leah ate hungrily.

"I'm so glad you are here with us, Leah," Mama said. "You will stay with us now, and sleep with Freide, Clara, and Anneke."

"I want to sleep with Gideon," Leah said.

"No, he is sleeping downstairs," Mama said, "but you can see him in the morning."

"I want Gideon," Leah repeated.

"It's not right for a little girl to sleep with a grown man," Mama said.

"I know, Mama, but I suppose that is what she has grown accustomed to," Clara said.

"I am really most concerned with what that Gideon has gotten used to, things with this innocent child," Mama said.

"Not in front of her," Clara warned.

"Come, Clara," I said. "Let's show Leah our bed, and see if she and Anneke are ready to go to sleep."

When Gideon came to see us the next morning, he asked if Leah had been crying all night long.

"No," Clara said. "That was Anneke. She has been crying ever since we found her."

"That makes it very dangerous for all of us hiding here," Gideon said.

"Yes," Mama said, "but from the street I'm sure no one can hear her. Anyway, we found her father and brother, and she will be leaving soon."

"I hope she goes today," Gideon said.

"No, we can't yet," Mama said. "No matter how unpleasant her weeping is, Anneke is not crying as loudly now, and we will continue to care for her as long as she needs us. She is just a small child!"

Gideon snorted and went back downstairs. We had learned Anneke's story, in small pieces when the child would answer one or two questions. Her health

slowly improved once she began to eat, but even we returned her to her father, she never smiled.

When Kroll and I found her in the bomb shelter, Anneke had been there for three or four days. Her mother had had a heart attack in the middle of the street. Before her mother died, she told Anneke to go hide in the shelter. Anneke didn't want to go to the convent orphanage we thought to send her to, so after two weeks with us, she joined her father. He was working in a mansion belonging to a Belgian family who collaborated with the Germans, and housed some Nazis there. Anneke's father cleaned the horse stables, and Anneke became a much-abused chambermaid.

One day, soon after Anneke left, some Belgian officials, inspectors of some sort, showed up outside the devil's house. The men stood around, looking at our hiding place.

"Something is going on in there," someone heard one of the officials say. Mama, Clara, Ilie and I packed to move again. Everyone left the devil's house the next morning. One by one, Kroll took us to hide in a beautiful house, which we soon learned was a house of prostitution.

Chapter 9

Hidden Child Conference, Brussels, 1994

Mom returned to Antwerp a few times after 1973, and together, she and Clara reestablished contact with Kroll, Blanche, and others who had become so important to them during World War II. It seems to me that the lack of talking about Mom's experience was my personal dilemma, for this was evidence that despite my impressions, Mom was involved in recovery work with her sister.

In 1994, I was writing a screenplay, and Mom invited me to join her for an International Hidden Child conference. Our plan was to attend the weekend conference, then meet Anneke and spend a few days in Antwerp with her.

Despite Anneke's tender care, and the many delicious chocolates which she replenished daily, I lost weight during this trip. I wasn't horrified or overwhelmed by what I learned; in fact, I found out some good news about Belgium. The Belgian people, particularly in the convents, saved more children from the Nazis than any other European country.

What got me was all the emotion, and my imagined need to hold back my own floodgates. Mom, Anneke and I discussed the book I wanted to write.

Anneke described her experiences as a chambermaid for an anti-Semitic wealthy woman. After the war, she and her father were arrested and given a few months in jail. Many people at this time were accused of collaboration with the Nazis, but others were arrested due to the continuing anti-Semitism. Anneke told me they'd joke that though the judges smoked American cigarettes, they still arrested Jews.

As soon as she could, Anneke went to Israel, where she joined the fight for independence from the British. Because of her background in textiles, she helped sew parachutes. Ironically, Anneke was now fighting alongside of Begin against the English, who had liberated her from the Germans. Of her large family, only she, her father, her brother, and one cousin survived persecution by the Nazis.

While Mom and I visited Belgium, remarkable things kept happening. One morning at the conference, Mom and I stood where books were being sold.

"I was in hiding with this family," a woman said, pointing at Clara's book. I went to her and without explaining, took her to Mom, then watched as Mom and Leah Appel wept, hugging one another and asking each other countless questions. They hadn't seen each other for 40 years.

We also found a gentleman, Jack, who shared a photo with us, remembering his acquaintance with Ilie. Somehow, Jack immediately knew who we were, but I believe he had read the roster and sought us out. Jack gave us a copy of a large group photo of children, which included young Freide as well as Ilie. Jack lives in Manhattan, and meeting him was another special discovery.

On the Run (May, 1943)

Kroll and Blanche somehow found hiding places for my family and everyone else whom had been hiding in the devil's house. We weren't sorry to leave there, hoping to move somewhere where there were working facilities, electric, and heat. Kroll took Ilie and Mama to the tall apartment building, then moved Clara and I. Two of the women who lived there, whose names could have been Bertha and Janette, had agreed to share a bedroom so that we would have a place to stay. The

four of us would now share just one room, Bertha's bedroom, which was on the fifth or sixth floor. There was a kitchen and bathroom across the hall.

Anything would have seemed luxurious after the stench and peeling paint we'd lived with for about a month in the devil's house. The bottom floors of this hotel were decorated to entice German customers, as it was a house of prostitution, which is legal in Belgium. Upstairs were the private quarters for the prostitutes. All of the women who lived there were kind to us, as well as opposed to the Germans, but it was a contradiction. While they hated the Germans, at the same time they also wanted them since they paid well.

There were days when Janette would act especially pleased.

"Oh, there's going to be a lot of work," she said. "Lots of Germans, a new group, just came in," she explained. The soldiers would all line up on the street outside, and Bertha and Janette would disappear to the floors below. Hours later, they'd return tired but with chocolates, gifts and money.

Janette soon told us Bertha's sad story. Bertha was born into a large, Polish-Jewish family, and had been married, sight unseen, to a Belgian-Jewish man. Her husband brought her to Antwerp when she was about thirteen or fourteen. She soon had a son, who may have been named Moss, and when we met her, she was twenty years old, and her son was about five.

After two years of marriage, her husband had decided she needed a profession so that she could support him. He made her into a whore. Her son lived with her most of the time, and she was miserable. Of course, she never let on to her German customers that she was Jewish.

Mama was beyond herself that her daughters were exposed to this. Clara and I were also shocked, but at some point, we found it amusing as well. The prostitutes were very human, down-to-earth, and they liked us. They would often share

chocolates or other treats their customers had brought them. I remember one woman gave me a tangerine. I hadn't seen a tangerine for years! We all feasted on that one tangerine.

I had an introduction into getting an abortion, as one prostitute gave me detailed instructions.

"If you find you are pregnant, you can easily to fix it with just a hanger," she said. She took out a wire hanger, and started to re-shape it.

"I don't want to see that," Clara said, leaving the room.

"Take the hanger and go up the vagina," the prostitute said. "I've performed hundreds of this type of abortion," she said, showing me the tip of the hanger. I was appalled.

Another night, Janette and my family and I were finishing dinner when Bertha arrived. Mama asked her to join us. Drunk and exhausted, she would only sip a little water.

"I don't know what's going to happen to me," Bertha said.

"Why, what is it?" Mama asked.

"What's going to become of my son?" Bertha said. "Look, look what I did to my life. I'd like to kill myself."

"No, Bertha, you don't want to do that," Janette said.

I felt devastated. What could anyone say to Bertha? She did have a problem, and it wasn't going to be simple to solve.

Bertha stood up, went over and opened a window. Suddenly, several of us realized her intent, and rushed to grab her as she lunged herself outward.

"I don't want to live this anymore," Bertha said. "Let me go!"

Mama told someone to make some coffee, as others held Bertha down. Janette brought in Moss.

"Look, Bertha, here is Moss. He needs you," Mama said. They put the child on Bertha's lap.

Bertha soon settled down, but that is a scene I will never forget. Her suffering affected me strongly.

It seemed like we stayed at the whorehouse for an eternity. I'm not sure whether we were there a week or a month in all. As much as we could, we tried to continue our lives.

After some time, a farmer who had been contacted by Kroll arrived to transfer us to his farm, a little outside of Antwerp. He came with a haystack in a wagon, drawn by a horse. It was dark, and that was how we were transported, all together, hidden by the hay.

We were very uncomfortable at the farm, and I can't quite remember whether we stayed longer than a week, but we lived inside a barn with the animals. Then Blanche and Kroll came to see us.

"Our apartment on Stadion Straat is ready for us now," Kroll said.

"You said, 'our apartment,' Kroll," Ilie said. "Will you be living there also?"

"Yes, we have brought the lease for Freide to sign," Blanche said. "Kroll and she will pretend to be renting this place as boyfriend and girlfriend."

"I have thought about this, and it seemed better that way." Kroll explained. "Now Freide will be able to come and go as she needs. Of course, Mrs. Heller, the rest of the family will have to continue hiding inside, but this home will be very comfortable for you, I hope."

"We are so grateful to you, Kroll, Blanche," Mama said.

"For the time being, Gideon and Leah will also be staying at Stadion Straat, and I'm afraid that we will continue to have people hiding with us as needed," Kroll said.

"There is no need to apologize," Mama said. "Kroll, you have done so much for us. And the Resistance work is very important. As Hillel said, 'if I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?' How can we begrudge others less fortunate than ourselves?"

Our Own Place (May, 1943 – September, 1944)

81 Stadion Straat was similar to the Addams' house, a small townhouse, but it was ours, and we took great comfort moving into it. Nicely furnished, it was like the many row houses in Antwerp, and located on a nice street near the sports stadium. It was very European, with four small bedrooms and a kitchen that Mama could finally call her own. Even though we were constantly hungry, and I wasn't sure how Kroll could afford the rent, I felt better than I had in months.

One time I met someone on the street whom I had known before the war. On the streets, I always tried to keep to myself, so I wouldn't have spoken with him, except that he recognized me and called out my name. After a few moments, he began asking me where I lived. I kept my mouth shut, as I felt I didn't trust this man, and I walked away as fast as I could.

Kroll and Blanche kept bringing in people to hide, but Mama never cooked for anyone besides our family and Kroll. She had to stretch our staple diet of potatoes, cabbage, and onions as far as possible. She also managed to bake four loaves of bread using only one pound of flour. It sounds unappetizing, but the only meat we regularly ate was an occasional piece of beef lung added to our broth. Mama always tried to feed thin Kroll, who never wanted anything for himself. When he worked, he gave all the money away.

One time, we had hiding with us a family with a boy about to celebrate his fifth or sixth birthday. This little boy had never had a birthday cake. Somehow, Mama baked him a cake, and everyone ate a small slice.

"Can I have another piece of bread," the boy asked, after he ate his cake. He was very happy.

Oste had become a colonel. Even though he was in the Belgian army, which the Germans considered pro-German, throughout the war he worked with the Resistance. Sometimes he and Blanche would visit us, or Blanche would bring her sister Titine. Titine liked to spend time with Clara and Mama, and these kind people were concerned about helping us keep our spirits up. Each in their own way, they gave us tremendous moral support.

Sometimes Blanche or Oste would tell us what was happening in the war, and they'd come in with positive news.

"This is going so well," Blanche would say, and tell us what the Resistance was doing. When America came into the war, that was a boost.

"You're going to survive this, you're going to be alright," they said.

The days stretched long as we hid. One day in the late spring, 1944, Kroll brought home my brother's friend, Josef Albers.

"Have you seen Heshey? Tell us about Heshey." Mama said immediately, searching his face. He shook his head sadly, and my heart broke.

Josef looked like a shadow. He was frightening for us to see, with his eyes so big and dark in his wasted, thin face. As soon as Mama saw him, I think she knew. She said nothing, but fed him broth and some bread.

We knew Josef had studied to be a tailor before the German occupation, and together with Heshey, he was deported in May 1942. Josef told us that after leaving Antwerp, he and Heshey had been separated, and Josef went almost immediately to

Auschwicz. A few months later, Josef saw Heshey arrive at Auschwicz, and realized he was ill. He snuck him some extra food and things, whatever he could, and Heshey recovered.

"Being a tailor, the Germans needed me," Josef said. "At Auschwicz I worked constantly. There was always an officer who wanted me to make or repair his clothes."

"What happened?" Clara asked.

"Auschwicz was a death camp," he said. "The Germans murdered large masses of people, many Jews. For over a year, all I could do was hold up from one day to the next. The things I saw were too horrible. My fear controlled my thoughts, and somehow, my emotions turned off as I focused on surviving."

"Then I began to plan an escape from there. And here I am."

We watched him sip his broth. Mama asked again about Heshey.

"They put him to work, then, because he was strong," Josef said. "Then I heard some officers ask him to be a kappo. 'No, I can't inform on my people. I will never do that,' I heard Heshey tell them."

"That day, I saw Heshey go in with a group to the showers. "As soon as I heard 'showers' I knew it was the gas chambers," Josef said.

We never learned anything more about Heshey's death. We couldn't have a funeral, either. For the rest of the occupation, Josef stayed with us, and Mama fed him carefully to help him regain his health. He had been without food for so long, his stomach had to learn again how to digest it, and he was sick for a time.

My boyfriend Arthur liked to meet me in the park, and that was a good excursion for me, as I would often find some wild greens that Mama could cook for us. I was always sad to see other starving people scavenging the same way.

"I still would like you to bring your family to visit my house," Arthur asked several times. I gave up trying to explain the dangers to him; even after all that had happened, even though I had told him about Father, then about Heshey, he and his father walked the streets wearing their Jewish star, somehow still unaware that there were few other Jews openly remaining in Antwerp.

I continued working in the Resistance, and most days were the same. A typical mission for the White Brigade would lead me to sit on a bench outside a cafe or somewhere in Antwerp's streets, at a pre-scheduled time. A person I often didn't know soon sat next to me, and I knew this was the man I was supposed to meet because he wore a certain color or said a certain word. When I saw no one was looking, I passed a folded paper to him. Inside the paper was a book of food coupons.

I turned my back to him, pretending to watch some birds peck the dry ground. The man soon left, after briefly and cautiously thanking me with a nod and wink. The next month, I might meet this same person again, or never see him again, but no matter whom I saw or where I went, I was quite busy in the White Brigade. There were many times when I felt I was being followed, and then would wander around for hours and hours. While my brother and sister envied that I could go outside, I often envied that they seemed so safe and secure, out of danger's way, hidden. I had no desire to quit the White Brigade, but I was often afraid these days and watched my back.

For entertainment, we had very little, so Ilie, Clara, and I would often just watch people outside our window. One evening, soon after we arrived at Stadion Straat, Ilie was looking out the window when he told us he wanted us to see something.

There were many couples strolling in the streets, German soldiers with their girlfriends, and some Belgian citizens. Ilie pointed at a very decorated German soldier, who was walking with a gorgeous woman. The woman wore a fancy coat with a fur scarf around her neck, a pair of three-inch high-heeled shoes, and expensive looking stockings. There was lust in the looks they gave one another, and the three of us giggled as we watched the way they stared.

All of a sudden Ilie gasped a little, and I saw that the woman's underpants were falling down. As soon as she realized this, with shock and surprise she tried to pull them back up, but she was still walking along, so she almost fell over! People in the street started to look at the couple in a funny way, to point and ogle them. The soldier didn't know how to react, while the woman still continued to tug on her panties. Abruptly, the soldier pushed the woman's arm out of his arm, and walked off. Surprised to be abandoned, the woman pulled her panties all the way down and stepped out of them, then walked away quickly.

"Clara, did you ever?" I said, and we all dissolved into laughter. We couldn't laugh aloud, but our stifled mirth was uncontrollable. It was pent up energy from the days and nights of worry and hiding.

"Oh, my goodness," Mama said, holding onto a chair.

"Oh, ladies," Ilie said in a shrill falsetto, "can you help a poor soul like me put my panties back on?"

For the next long year that we lived in hiding, Ilie would often ask me to play the part of the German soldier; he would dress in Mama's finery, or a combination of mine and Clara's, and we'd prance through the apartment until he caused his panties to fall down and we fell again into controlled laughter.

Now that we had our own house, everyone would sometimes go outside. This didn't happen often, and if they went out at all, they went very early in the

morning or when it was starting to get dark. I'd go outside first, and survey the street before they'd go out, to make sure nobody was there to see us.

"I want to be outside, free," Ilie said. He was a child who didn't see the sunlight for many weeks. He would go outside at night sometimes to see the stars.

One spring day, I found an undernourished, starving kitten in the park. It was brown and white, and looked half dead, but when I picked it up, it tried to meow, so I brought it home.

"Mama, we have a new friend," I said.

"Out!" Mama said. "We can't afford that cat. We don't have food for it."

"Mama," Clara said, "please let us keep her. Look how sweet she is."

"I'll let her have half of my food," I said.

"No," Mama said. "Put her out of here, now!"

"Now you are making Freide cry," Clara said. "Please let us keep her: I'll give her some of my food, too."

"Me too," Ilie said. "And how much food can a tiny kitty like that need, anyway?"

"Oh, I'm out-numbered. You children! Let's see: I have a little sour cream here. Give it to her."

The cat quickly licked up the dish of sour cream. "Meow!" It insisted, then started to clean its paws.

"Oh, thank you, Mama," I said. "Look how she loves the sour cream!"

"Do you like your new home, Smenty?" Mama said.

Mama named the cat this because of the Yiddish word, smetina, which means sour cream. I made a little bed out of a box for our new kitten. Smenty grew very attached to me, and would stand by the door every time I went out, waiting for my

return. Once in a while, she would escape the house, to run five or six months and find me, and then I had to bring her back home.

September, 1944

Throughout most of our time in hiding, Arthur Schlesinger was my boyfriend. Our dates were usually brief meetings in the park to kiss, talk, pet; he brought me chocolates, flowers, and other little treats. On the first day of September, I rushed home after Oste told me the bad news. I couldn't cry, much as I wanted to. It was hard enough to breathe.

"What happened," Mama asked when she saw my face. I went into my room and lay down on the bed, and Smenty jumped onto my chest.

"I met Oste today, and he said that Arthur is dead."

Mama sat next to me and took my hand.

"Arthur's mother, his father, are dead too. The entire Yudenraden, more than seventy people, gone. Oste told me what the black shirts did to them," I couldn't go on.

Mama sat quietly, and Smenty continued to purr. I was aware of street noises and the hollow sound of my breath.

"The black shirts used gas to kill them." I said. "Oste called it a portable gas chamber."

"We have to be strong," Mama said. "We have survived this long, we just have to go on. Father, he should rest in peace, wouldn't want us to give up now."

"Mama, I kept telling Arthur that he should hide! He always said, 'no, my family is safe, we are Belgians for three generations.' He asked me to marry him."

"We have to go on. Here, I'll make you some tea."

Mama held my hand until I fell asleep.

The next day, we heard on the radio and in the streets that the British had liberated Brussels. We knew that France had already been restored. We were excited in a cautious way; Kroll and others in the White Brigade worried that things would be more dangerous for us in Antwerp until we too were liberated. The next few days seemed the longest days I'd ever lived.

Early in the morning, on September 4, 1944, Oste met me in the park. That was a moment I'll never forget. I was sitting alone, missing Arthur, and he sat next to me. We pretended we didn't know each other, acting like polite strangers until we were sure that no one was watching us. I was down, in a dark place.

"I hope your Mama and family are well," Oste said. "Blanche sends her love—she hopes to come see you soon."

"Things are getting so much worse. We have so little food," I said.

"Few Belgians have enough food, which is not good for the Jews that remain. Please be very careful."

We watched the birds peck at pebbles.

"I don't want to give you any false hopes, but I think today Antwerp will be liberated," Oste continued. "Brussels has been taken back, I feel we are next."

"What has happened?"

"The American army is in the port at Le Havre—and they are moving up the coast. There is a big move going on."

"What would you like me to do," I asked.

"Go straight home and stay inside. I am going now to the place where I believe the British will land."

"I can't believe it. It's like a dream," I said.

"Yes."

He told me not to say anything to anyone, as things might not work out.

"Don't come out until you hear the tanks of the liberators in the streets," he said. Even then, you should be cautious. Any black shirts who remain could be very dangerous, shooting randomly. Of course, the Belgians who collaborated with the Germans might be the most dangerous now."

Adding that we should watch our neighbors, Oste promised he would be in touch within a few days. He reached over and squeezed my hand, then stood up and walked out of the park.

Chapter 10

Writing Retreat

I went on a writing retreat, which meant all I had to do for two weeks was write. Meals were ready at set times every day. In the late afternoons I could get together with other writers and share; or, on some days, I chose to stay at the keyboard and write more. Being on this writing retreat enabled me to essentially complete a first draft, and I also learned about my personal approach to the writing process.

When I teach writing, particularly to children, I find there are always a few students who want to write the words "the end" after their pieces. Writing these words has never appealed to me, probably because of my view of time and memory. To me, time never stops or ends. Perhaps the interest in a story may end, or the message will be said, but in real life, people and events go on. Memory, like time, never ends, for if you wish to make the effort, you can recall more and more details about things that have occurred.

"Our stories are never finished," Mom said about her experiences and her memories. "There's always something that comes back in our mind and some of it we just—it's just there. The rest of the world won't understand it anyway."

Our minds protect us from excessive pain and suffering. Mom has always taught me not to dwell on things, telling me it's important to go on and live our lives. Mom's message of hope inspires me to live my life well.

One day during the retreat, I called Mom to verify some information and dates. Every day I stayed at my computer for about six hours, listening to music and writing. I am lucky to have Mom's love of music, and her sense of humor has

always been a source enjoyment. Mom's humor usually makes me laugh, and I needed to laugh during this intense work.

"What was the date when the Germans forbade Jewish children from going to school?" I asked.

"It was in May, 1942."

"So, how old were you?"

"I was thirteen, I think."

"Now, wait; you were born in 1925, right?" I asked.

"Yes."

"So, you would have been seventeen."

"No, that can't be," Mom said. "I was younger than seventeen, I'm sure."

We discussed her idea about how old she was, and I believe she feels she was younger because today's children are less protected in some ways than they were when Mom was growing up. Then, children were children, although once they married they had to make a quick transition to adulthood. When Mom compares herself to today's seventeen-year-olds, she feels she was younger when she was seventeen. This difference may also be partly because children of the 1990's are exposed to adult material through the media.

Mom's attitude about age has long been a source of laughs for Shalom, Heshi and I. I remember how stubbornly she ignored our frequent attempts to pin down her real age. In particular, when Shalom went to college, Heshi and I felt we finally had the evidence we needed. We could prove, without a doubt, that Mom was not twenty-one, even though she had claimed she was, all our lives.

"Mom," Heshi said at dinner one night, "how can you be twenty-one? Shalom is in college. In fact, he is nineteen. Are you going to tell Marian and I that you gave birth to him when you were three?"

"No," Mom said. "I didn't want to tell you this, but I suppose I have to. I adopted Shalom when I was four years old."

Liberation (September 4, 1944)

Clara and the others were surprised to see me return home so quickly, as I usually was not home during the day. I think I scared them a little, coming in, until they realized it was I. They were listening to the radio.

"Turn off the radio right now," I said.

"Why?" Mama said.

"Today is going to be a very incredible day," I said. "We may be free people again." I told the three of them what Oste had said, explaining the need for secrecy and extra caution.

"Don't get your hopes up," I said. "Oste said he felt today would be the day, but he also warned that things may not move as quickly as the army hopes."

We spent the day waiting, listening, and watching through the windows. In the late afternoon, we heard noises in the street: it was British tanks! With hardly a thought, we rushed out the door and jumped on the tanks, kissing all the British soldiers who rode on top. Clara rode on a tank for a while, then re-joined Mama and Ilie on the stoop in front of our house.

It was unbelievable. I saw Ilie drinking in the sunlight. We had two others hiding with us: Heshey's friend Josef Albers, and eighty-year-old Mrs. Cohen. A neighbor came up to us.

"Are you with the Germans?" She asked.

"Why do you think that?" Clara said.

"I heard you listen to BBC radio," the neighbor said.

"You're right," I said. "We often had our little radio playing, very softly, but I suppose not softly enough. The walls between our houses are like paper."

"We were hiding," Mama said, "we are Jews."

"I never saw you, Mrs. Heller. I only saw her," the neighbor said, pointing at me.

"We had many people here, hiding. At one point, I believe we had about twenty people hiding with us."

"That is astonishing," the neighbor said. "You should have told us. We would have helped you."

So many things happened once we were liberated. The war was not over, and bombing by V-bombs was frequent in Antwerp. We had to find jobs. Also, Mama wanted to know about our house on Leewerick Straat. Clara and I found that the house was completely gone. The houses there were in various states of ruin, with nothing salvageable anywhere in our old neighborhood. The furniture and walls of many buildings had been removed, as if people had pillaged through, seeking treasure. We were lucky that my voice teacher had some of our furniture, which we soon moved to our home on Stadion Straat. We had entrusted our fancy linens, which Mama had embroidered by hand, and other things as well, to other non-Jewish neighbors when we first went into hiding, but only Liza returned our things to us. The others pretended they knew nothing about our things, shrugged their shoulders, and avoided us.

Clara and I found jobs of various sorts, working for the British army canteen. One day a bomb landed on a movie theater, killing 320 people, less than a block from where we worked on Keyserlie Straat. Our building practically fell apart when the bomb fell. I was down in the basement, so I remained uninjured, but Clara was upstairs, and took a little shrapnel in her back. There was screaming and ambulances came to help everyone.

Mama tried to start the soda factory again, and kept busy putting things together. Ilie went back to finish high school for a little while, and found a job as an errand boy. Soon he went to France, to help with the Exodus group, which brought Jewish children to Palestine. There he met Helen, a reporter from Denmark, and together they went to Israel, where they married.

Mama also continued to watch over Leah Appel, but Leah eventually went to an orphanage. Her parents and brother never returned; they had died in Auschwicz.

We tried to get our youth group back together, but there were very few Jewish people left in Antwerp. I sang in little concerts here and there, and then, with Liza's help, performed with the violinist Yehudi Menuhim. Our program was advertised with posters hung all around Antwerp, and everywhere I went I saw my photo. The program was a fund-raiser for survivors. There was very little money from the government and little food. Many Belgians were hungry.

I also had a few boyfriends, and some very sad experiences, too. I fell in love with Israel Bergman, a British soldier; we dated for a month or so, and talked about getting married. Then he had to leave, and he was killed.

Clara and I met Danny Isaacman and Rubin Gorewitz, American soldiers who were friends, and within a few months, we were all married. The men had to return to their army duties, so in February 1946, we followed our husbands to the United States, in a boat filled with war brides.

I went to study at the Manhattan College of Music. On March 15, I sang in a radio program called, "Voice of America: I'm an American Day." I sang "The Star-Spangled Banner," and some other songs, and was followed by Eleanor Roosevelt, who made a speech. Mrs. Roosevelt also complemented me on my singing, and she hoped I would sing again on the radio, inviting me to come again.

My life has been full of so many incredible people, and I hope there will be another book about it. In New York, I met Martha Graham, and soon my husband and I became involved with many artists and creative people.

In December 1997, I was videotaped for the Shoah archives being compiled by Steven Spielberg.

"I wouldn't be the person I am now if I hadn't had that experience," I said. "I think much more. I'm not as trustful as I should be. When I meet a person, I think many different thoughts. I have many friends who are not Jewish, but I question them much longer than I assume a normal person who has not had that experience would. And it takes longer to convince me that there is not a little strain of anti-Semitism there."

"When I think of Heshey and Father, I say, 'why? They didn't do anything bad.' Heshey was a very special person, and we don't know where there is a grave or anything. I do think of him very often, and of my father, too."

It tires me to talk about the war years, but I want to do it.

"I have been able to change many children's lives," I said when I was taped. "I have talked to many classrooms and groups. I have received many letters from people, saying that my speaking to them, seeing a person that went through it, gave them a completely different insight into what it was all about."

It is important to me that people know this story and understand that the Holocaust really did happen. I hope this story helps people in our world prevent this from ever happening again.

Life Goes On (Epilogue)

Of all European countries, Belgian citizens helped the most Jewish children survive the atrocities of World War II. However, of the more than 27,000 Jewish people living (in Antwerp????) before the war, approximately 25,000 were deported, and only 1300 returned, while 2600 Jewish people survived by hiding.

**Belgium had 60,000 Jews before the war; 12,000 survived??? What is the correct data????? Belgians who were deported only went to Auschwicz.

When the war ended, the Hellers removed Shulum's body from the mass grave and gave him his own grave, although they didn't know if it was really his body.

Freide Heller married Rubin Gorewitz and moved to New York, despite offers from a European opera company. She worked alongside her husband in his accounting business, and raised two sons and a daughter. She divorced her husband in the 1980's and now has three grandchildren. Freide continues to teach high school and enjoys herself with chavura activities, art shows, opera, and other cultural activities with her friends and family.

Rosa Heller tried to restart the soda factory in Antwerp, but soon followed Clara and Freide to the United States, where she remarried and lived near Freide in New York until she died in 1989.

Clara Heller married Danny Isaacman and moved to Philadelphia, where she raised a son and became a teacher. She continues to teach religious school and give lectures on her experiences as a hidden child.

Ilie Heller continued his studies and became a well-known Canadian engineer, after fighting in the 1948 Israeli War for Independence. His wife Helen and he, who married in Israel, moved to Canada and raised three children. He continues to live in Canada where he has three grandchildren.

Kroll remained in Antwerp, where he lived with his daughter until his death in 1999. Immediately after the war, he was sentenced to two years in jail, due to the continued anti-Semitism in Belgium. Even though the Germans were gone, people were hungry and looking for scapegoats. Kroll spent only a day or so in jail, as he was rescued from imprisonment by Sterngold.

Sterngold lives in Antwerp and has written a book about how he helped more than three hundred Jewish people survive the persecution of the Germans.

Blanche von Emerich and **Oste Last Name???** were married shortly after the war ended. Blanche, who recently died of natural causes, is survived by her younger sister, Titine, who lives in the same house they shared as children growing up in Antwerp.

Leah Appel went to London to live with some cousins, and later moved to Brussels, Belgium, where she entered the medical profession, married, and raised a daughter.

Chaya Brenner was adopted by a famous actor and **Hannah Haimowitz** was also adopted. We don't know what happened to either one afterwards.

Anneke Knobel survived the war with her brother, father, and only one cousin out of 82 family members. She moved to Israel, where she folded parachutes as a member of the Israeli army. With her daughter, she now runs a successful women's clothing store in Antwerp.

Liza Van Aden divorced her husband and continued to teach voice.

Yaegar and **Jan Van Aden** were only two of a number of Belgians arrested after the war due to their collaborations with the Germans during Germany's occupation of Belgium.

Glossary

Adonai
Auschwicz
Ave Verum
Baruch Hashem
Bialick
blondlockig
Bubby
Buber
cheder
Dossin Kazerne work camp in Mechelen
dreidels
goyish
goyta
Habonim
Hashomer Hatzayeer
Hertzel
Hillel
Kaddish
Kibbutz
Kiddush
Kristalnacht
Lake Keneret
Magen David
minyan
Palestine
Pesach
seder
shul
Sukkah
Sukkas
tefillin
Tekitsa
Tesika
Unrah
Yad Vashem
Yudenrade
Zionism